

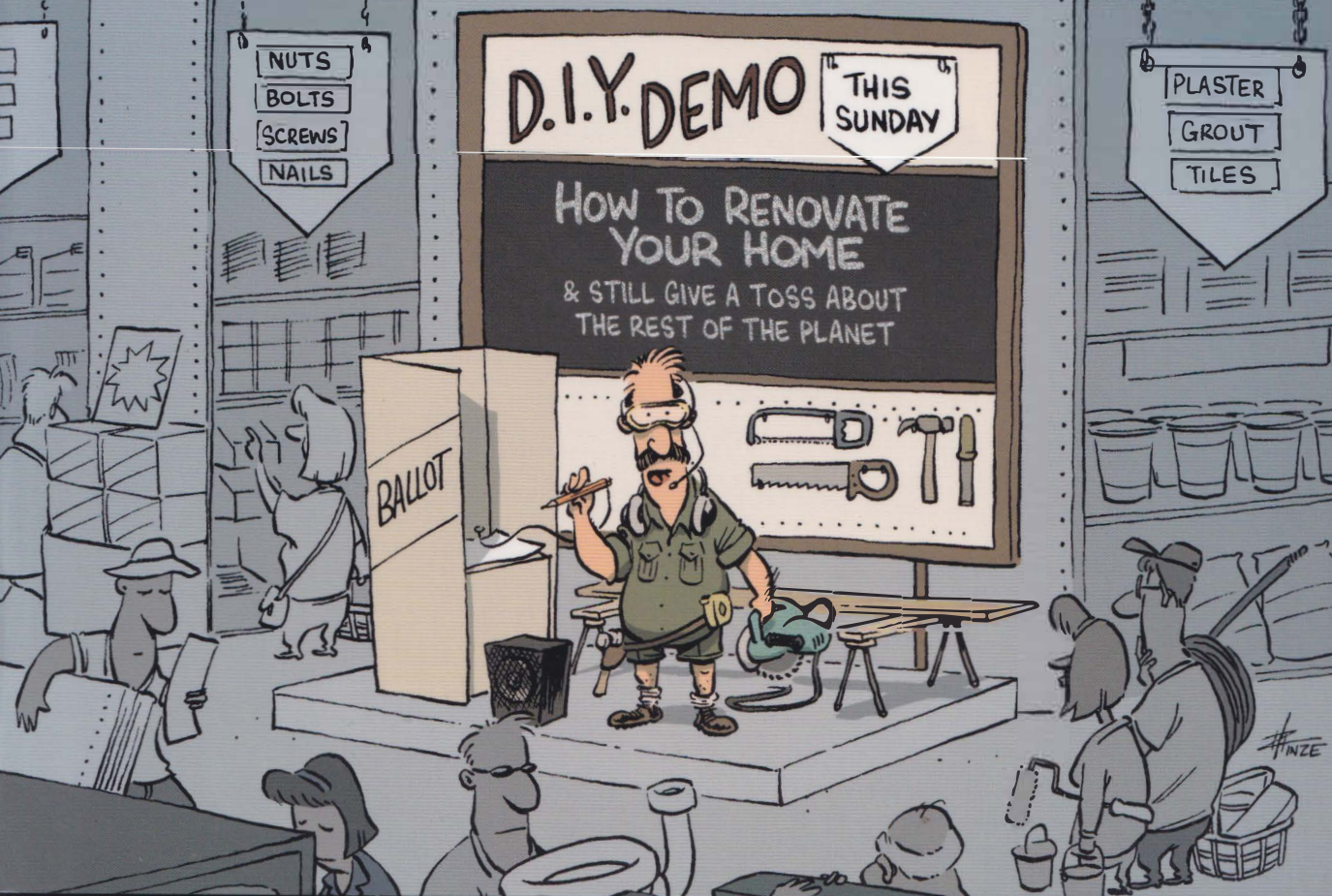
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THE YEARS OF UNLEAVENED BREAD, AGAIN



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THE YEARS OF UNLEAVENED BREAD, AGAIN

IN THIS ISSUE we pay tribute to the poet Shelton Lea, who died on 13 May. Shelton had been a close friend and protégé of Barrett Reid, a member of the Heide circle of artists and intellectuals. Reid was associate and poetry editor of *Overland* from 1967 and its editor between 1988 and 1993.

I didn't know Shelton well but had seen and spoken to him at various launches and readings over the past decade. He usually sat at the *Overland* table at the Premier's Literary Awards and was a lone boisterous figure in a room full of mannered bookish types. I grudgingly admired his bravado while wishing he wouldn't draw attention to us. He invested so much store in his own identity as a poet – of the romantic mould – that you expected his work to be terrible. But it wasn't. I was pleasantly surprised to find I enjoyed reading and listening to his poetry. In an obituary for the *Australian* (24 June), Jen Jewel Brown described him as “arguably Australia's finest romantic poet”, and I do think the critical interest in his poetry will increase.

Shelton tended to remind me of the wizened ‘Doctor’ Robert Levet in the famous poetic description by Samuel Johnson: “Well tried through many a varying year . . . Officious, innocent, sincere, / Of ev'ry friendless name the friend . . . Obscurely wise, and coarsely kind”. But I only knew Shelton as an older man. While staying with Dorothy Hewett in the Blue Mountains, helping her collate and organise her papers for what was intended to be the second volume of her autobiography, I came across a letter from Dorothy, telling of her meeting Shelton and describing him as a striking, wild young man. Jenni Mitchell's portrait shows that younger person (see *Overland* 154, 1999), evoked also here by Michael Sharkey.

Shelton certainly had an interesting life, one largely unconstrained by bourgeois conventions. At least one biography of him is underway. He has left a legacy of courage, colour and originality, demonstrating through example how it is possible to remain an optimist and even an aesthete in a world where opportunity and beauty are jealously guarded by wealth and privilege.

The Australia of the past decade has of course been that of Howard, a person who, culturally, brings to mind T.S. Eliot's ‘hollow men’ or Marianne Moore's

‘steamroller’. Writing in *Meanjin* in 1973, Manning Clark suggested that during the Menzies era Australia had become “a member of a club of three or four nations committed to the defence of economic privilege for the few and the supremacy of the white man”. A parallel between the Australias of Menzies and Howard comes to mind, particularly if our membership of what Mary Kalantzis terms the “Axis of Anglos” (*Overland* 178) is taken into account, though it has to be said that Clark's ‘club’ nowadays includes more than a few members. “The great Australian dream of social equality and mateship”, Clark writes, “was bleeding to death in the jungles and paddy-fields of Vietnam.” Today we're in Iraq, and the dream Clark refers to needs more than a blood transfusion: perhaps cryogenic resuscitation.

Clark goes on however to draw a contrast between the politics and the art of the Menzies age: “The men and women with the creative gifts . . . expanded our minds and helped us to see ourselves as we really were”. “Paradoxically,” Clark says, “the more exciting [the artists] made our lives, the greater the mess and the mire and the moral disgrace to which the government of the day exposed us.” Again, a parallel with our own time comes to mind. Louise Swinn suggests in this issue that there is a deal of exciting and stimulating new literary work both emerging now and on the horizon. Perhaps the value and attraction of art becomes more obvious during moments of profound political and social conservatism, as we experience for ourselves what Clark, in reference to the Menzies era, called “the years of unleavened bread”.

As a poet, Shelton Lea dealt with language, imagery and symbols, in a sense the primary materials of culture. Most contributors to this issue are, as ever in *Overland*, broadly concerned with the historically specific relationship between culture and society; and more particularly with the political dimensions of that relationship.

Sean Scalmer, who has earlier written incisively for *Overland* on ‘elites’ (*Overland* 154, 1999), turns his attention to recent uses of the ‘aspirational’ label by journalists, politicians, spin doctors and academics, arguing that while the term registers a desire for class mobility, it is in fact the latest in a long line of terms used to describe groups of people who sit ‘in-between’ the

major socio-economic classes, thereby paradoxically revealing the continuing importance of class constraints.

Les Thomas, *Overland's* new designer, writes on the case of his brother 'Jihad Jack' Thomas (did you get that, ASIO?), currently being charged under the Federal Government's draconian 'anti-terrorism' legislation. Les discusses also the active role of the corporate media in facilitating the Government's vilification of Jack, part of the Government's wider agenda of reducing the rights and liberties of the general public and doing away with the legal checks and balances that have historically limited the domestic operations of state power. (Although given that the Commonwealth Department of Public Prosecutions has just commented that further investigation into the affairs of millionaire businessman Steve Vizard may be pointless because of the media's influence on a potential jury, perhaps Jack Thomas has nothing to worry about.) Relevant also to understanding and surviving the present McCarthysim is Brian Martin's 'how to' article on whistleblowing.

Arnold Zable reviews Gwenda Tavan's new study of the White Australia policy and Tavan discusses this work and its personal bases with Vin D'Cruz. Jessica Raschke examines the great debates over 'multicultural' literature during the 'culture wars' of the 1980s and 1990s. She finds that while "arguments over class, gender and sexuality can prompt a bit of literary bruising . . . the tetchy grounds of race, ethnicity, and more specifically multiculturalism, invariably trigger an all-in brawl". The legacy of the Whitlam Government, which via Al Grassby introduced Australian multiculturalism, is discussed by Peter Holding.

In his important 1998 novel *Three Dollars*, Elliot Perlman's character Tanya "predicted that the day would come when people would have difficulty remembering a time that movements in the stock market were not reported more frequently than the road toll or air pollution indices". Ours, the novel's Eddie, suggests, is "a world so desperate for high priests that it rewarded the neo-classical librettists of macro self-interest with nouveau mandarin status". At a time when knowledge of the philosophical and theoretical foundations of economics exists in inverse relationship to the pervasiveness of stock market reports, Tim Battin writes an important article on the social origins and effects of markets. He points out that all market outcomes are socially constructed and so goes on to argue that these outcomes should be chosen, or planned, democratically. His advice is as instructive to many of the Left as it is to those of the Right. Like Battin, however, the self-described 'child of the Enlightenment', Noam Chomsky, is eminently aware of the connection between economic, political and cultural power. Continuing our series profiling prominent and influential intellectuals, Clinton Fernandes offers here a new reading of Chomsky's life, work and reputation.

Overland is a quarterly magazine founded in 1954 by Stephen Murray-Smith.

SUBSCRIPTIONS \$42 a year (individuals) and \$45 (institutions); pensioners and students \$32; take-3 \$93 (*Island, Tirra Tirra, Overland*) within Australia; life subscription \$600; overseas US\$60. Donations over \$2 are tax deductible. Payment may be made by Mastercard, Visa or Bankcard.

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ISSN 0030 7416 ISBN 0 9750837 7 5

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This project has been assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body and by the Victorian Government through Arts Victoria—Department of Premier and Cabinet. *Overland* gratefully acknowledges the facility support of Victoria University and the financial support of its Faculty of Arts.

The *Overland* index is published annually on our website. *Overland* is indexed in APA Full Text, AUSLIT, *Australian Literary Studies* bibliography, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* bibliography and in microfilm and microfiche from University Microfilms International, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106, USA.
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ON WORKING-CLASS POETS

I am a PhD student requiring biographical information on the following working-class poets:

Fred Biggers (1897–?) and John (Jock) Graham (1907–1975), both coal miner poets from NSW coalfields; Leon Villiers (1873–1918) Melbourne tram driver, union leader and organiser; and Cecil S. Watts and Albert Ernest Chancellor (dates and occupations unknown).

If you can assist, please contact Elizabeth Rogers at tel/fax (08) 8379 3163 or e-mail: ejarogers@hotmail.com

ELIZABETH ROGERS

ON RICHARD KING'S REVIEW

I thoroughly enjoyed the Mabel Lee interview by Vin D'Cruz in *Overland* 179 but was totally unimpressed by the Richard King poetry review, not only because it was presented without offering any useful or helpful critical insight, but also because of its unfounded and untrue accusation of my "contempt for humanity". If Richard King has any knowledge of poetry at all, he should know better than to mix the poet-persona in the book with the person-pen who wrote it. Unfortunately, his failure to recognise this leads to his dislike for my poetry and to my dislike for his review.

OUYANG YU

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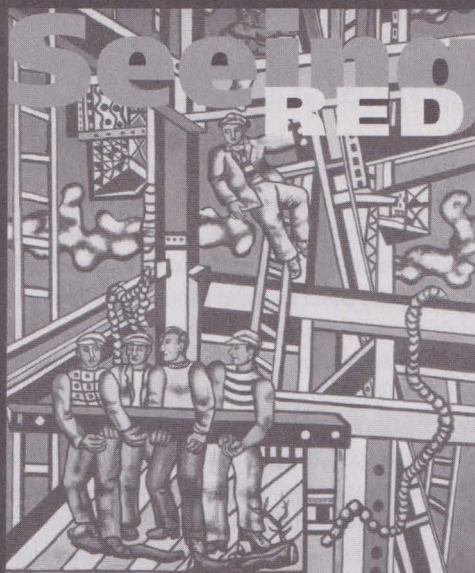
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SEARCHING FOR THE ASPIRATIONALS

ASPIRE: To have a fixed desire, longing, or ambition for something at present above one; to seek to attain, to pant, to long. (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

Aspiration is ambition. Those who lack, aspire.¹ The rich (who already possess so much, so easily) know little of longing or fixed desires.

How does 'aspiration' become 'aspirational'? Logically, all of those who aspire should form part of an 'aspirational' grouping. This is not the case, however. Somewhat paradoxically, the term is only applied to those who have achieved rather than desired; who possess, rather than seek. Enjoyment of material comfort (which actually implies the extinguishment of important 'aspirations') has somehow become the precondition of the 'aspirational'.

Precisely, how are 'the aspirationalists' identified? As has often been noted, the term defies easy definition.² Its most common associations are something of a grab-bag. Politically, it applies to swinging or uncommitted voters,³ as well as to new Liberal voters.⁴ Sociologically, it refers to those who work in particular occupations (specifically, as skilled tradespeople, mid-level clerical workers and blue-collar workers with specialised skills); but also to the self-employed;⁵ and, at a more general level, to any of those workers who have gained class mobility from the 'new economy'.⁶ Attitudinally, it applies to the greedy;⁷ but also to 'moral traditionalists' (who apparently believe in patriotism, community-mindedness and hard work);⁸ and even to the "fickle, unpredictable, anarchic attention-deficit, do-it-yourself, self-willed, suspicious and self-indulgent".⁹ The label has also

been applied to 'youth';¹⁰ to the Australian 'people' as a whole;¹¹ to those who choose 'private services' (like schools and hospitals);¹² to citizens who desire consumer goods;¹³ and to residents of new suburbs (and often large houses) on the fringes of Sydney and Melbourne.¹⁴

In short, the 'aspirationalists' are imagined in a range of contrary ways: young (but also approaching middle age); identified through patterns of consumption (but also associated with certain occupations); self-employed (but also salaried); selfish (but also community-minded); uncommitted (but also tied to the Liberal Party); particular (but also embracing the nation). Political scientists charged with compiling an Australian Survey of Social Attitudes have recently formulated an 'aspirational index'. It reflects this messy profusion. 'Aspirationality' (as distinct from 'aspiration') is associated with certain activities over the past five years: buying an investment property or shares; renovating your home; moving your child from a government to a private school; consulting a financial planner or a share adviser about future finances; buying a plasma television or home entertainment system; establishing or buying a small business; taking up private health insurance; seeking new qualifications to improve job prospects; getting a better-paid job through promotion or changing employers.¹⁵

Still, whatever the term lacks in coherence, it makes up for with popularity. Following its application in Britain,¹⁶ the language of the 'aspirationalists' entered Australian political parlance in 1998. It implied moderation and modernisation. Conservative strategists in NSW argued that 'aspirational'

Sydneysiders would reject strongly redistributive policies. John Della Bosca (then general secretary of the NSW ALP) suggested that Labor's support for a wealth tax had spooked this unfamiliar grouping of voters, and had thereby cost the Party victory.¹⁷ Similar arguments were proffered in 2001. In particular, an angry critic from the backbenches, Mark Latham, offered a strong rebuke to Labor's leadership. As he saw it, the ALP had ignored a vital presence in contemporary society:

working-class aspirants who are looking to the Labor Party to reward their effort and provide rungs . . . on the ladder of opportunity so they can do better for themselves and their families.¹⁸

Latham's political career represented a sustained (and largely unrequited) courtship of this grouping.¹⁹ By the end of 2004, his many speeches had made the 'ladder of opportunity' and the 'aspirational worker' wearily familiar to most voters.²⁰

However, Latham's defeat did not at all banish the term. Indeed, his linguistic obsessions may be one of his few legacies. After the fall, the problem of 'why Latham failed to inspire the aspirational' became a staple of newspaper commentary.²¹ Occasional columnists continue to muse on 'aspirational' greed.²² For his part, John Howard has recently proclaimed his own ability to reflect "the needs and the aspirations" of the residents of Western Sydney.²³ Alexander Downer has promised that the current government seeks "aspirational target[s]",²⁴ while Labor eminences, such as Paul Keating, criticise the failure of the ALP to connect with the "self-employed, small business voter".²⁵

In short, the 'aspirational' phenomenon has been a central object of political discussion for nearly a decade. It remains significant. The very definitional excess that accompanies the term – the incoherent lumping together of consumption, work, attitudes and groupings – is actually an expression of its tactical importance. Like 'the community', 'the people', or 'the battlers', representing the 'aspirational' can be a powerful ideological claim. Political centrality produces discursive abundance.

If the messiness of the term is frustrating, then perhaps disciplined comparison will clarify matters. First, the 'aspirational' are invariably contrasted with the *traditional* working class. Mark Latham has often used the term 'aspirational workers', implying that this collective is a special fragment of the work-

ing class.²⁶ In fact, most uses of the term suggest a direct rhetorical opposition. Aspirational are new, the working class is, so the argument goes, very old; aspirational work in the 'new economy', the traditional working class is a creature of blue-collar industry; aspirational consume, the old working class is thought to have gone without; aspirational are mobile, the working class is stationary; aspirational 'aspire', those who are not 'aspirational' are (quite offensively) assumed to lack such drive. If this group is a part of the working class, it is most often understood as a kind of proletarian antipodes – an inversion of traditional working-class experiences, prospects and hopes.

Does this mean that being 'aspirational' is simply a synonym for being 'middle class'? This is the hopeful view of some contemporary Liberals. Peter Costello has argued that aspirational voters were "discovered by Robert Menzies nearly fifty years ago. He called them the forgotten people".²⁷

Certainly, there are important similarities. Both terms represent an alternative to the harsh polarities of traditional class analysis. Like the aspirational, Menzies' forgotten people were associated with 'the home'. They were also ambitious and active – "lifters", not "leaners", and marked by a strong moral sensibility.²⁸

However, the differences are perhaps more obvious. Menzies' forgotten people formed the middle grouping of a tripartite class structure. Sandwiched between the "rich and powerful" and the "mass of unskilled people, almost invariably well organised", they were benighted and beset – victims of a "false" "class war".²⁹ In contrast, the 'aspirational' are depicted as powerful rather than powerless, ascendant rather than assailed. These are the winners of contemporary Australia; neither the rich nor the poor currently threaten their health. The upstarts are explicitly linked to the changing economy. Unlike the middle class, they do not inhabit the old professions, but the new workplaces of IT, or the edgy vigour of small business. 'Aspirational' are mobile; the 'forgotten people' are fixed.³⁰ Menzies' constituency was associated with order and learning; the 'aspirational' suggest change and brash materialism. This is a coltish grouping, reflecting a disordered, risk society.

Perhaps this is a 'lower middle class'? The term was first applied in Britain in the middle of the nineteenth century.³¹ Like the aspirational, this is a lumpy cate-

gory. It has always included diverse occupations, straddling small-business people and white-collar workers, shopkeepers and clerks.³² Conventionally, members of the lower middle class are thought to embrace the family and reject collective struggle. They quest for individual advancement.³³ Their dogged pursuit of self-improvement often seems vulgar and affected to the privileged.³⁴ In short, this is an *aspiring* group, as Rita Felski has argued:

It [the lower middle class] nurtures aspirations that distance it from stereotypes of working-class identity and that in turn appear pretentious and banal to those higher up the social ladder.³⁵

However, important differences also exist. Traditionally, the lower middle class is presented as feminine (or effeminate).³⁶ The archetype is ‘the gent’: small, effete, unmanly.³⁷ In contrast, ‘aspirationals’ are

In the late 1950s, many Australian intellectuals were also convinced that the class structure was undergoing fundamental change. At this time, ‘affluence’ rather than ‘aspiration’ was thought to be the new ingredient. Brian Fitzpatrick argued that the working class and professional clerical workers now enjoyed the same basic income.⁴² V.G. Childe felt that “the working classes as a whole have got what they want” (and jumped off Govett’s leap soon afterward).⁴³ E.M. Higgins believed that “higher living standards” and “a changing class structure” had undermined radical workers’ education.⁴⁴ Most famously, the historian Ian Turner sketched out a detailed vision of the new order. In a celebrated article, ‘The Life of the Legend’, Turner argued that the 1950s had remade Australian society. Consumer capitalism required budgeting, increased mass entertainment and pressured Australians to conform. This

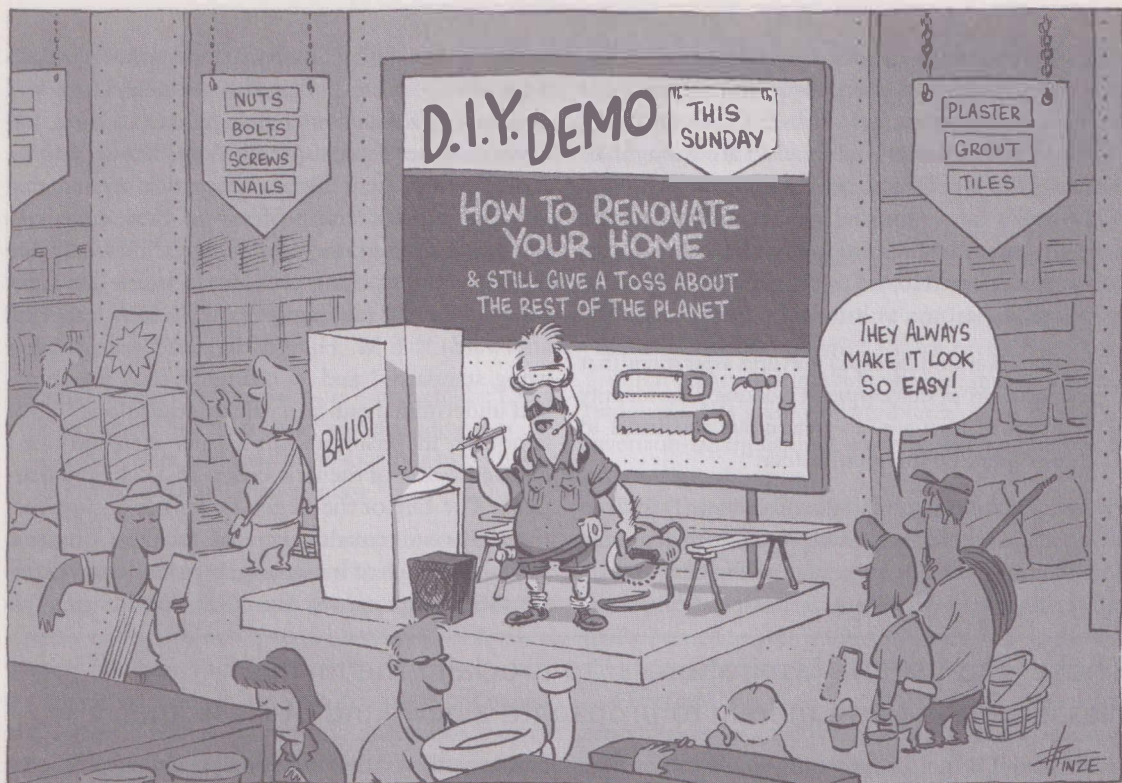
Those who use the ‘aspirationals’ to proclaim the myth of classlessness serve merely to propagate a new kind of class analysis.

masculine. The act of aspiration is associated with “ardent desire” and rising up;³⁸ tradesmen and technical workers are frequently advanced as examples. The lower middle class has traditionally been ignored;³⁹ the aspirationals, however, are courted politically and their values (whatever they might be) widely endorsed. Members of the lower middle class are usually presented as victims of anxiety and shame, “tortured by a constant struggle to keep up appearances on a low income”.⁴⁰ In contrast, the aspirationals enjoy a new wealth; their houses are large, bold, and self-confident. Political leaders from the lower middle class have often modulated their speech and hidden their origins;⁴¹ Mark Latham gloried in colloquialism and proudly acclaimed his suburban milieu. As a result, the label of ‘lower middle class’ fits poorly. If this grouping departs from the conventions of working-class behaviour, it equally overturns the typical dimensions of the lower middle class, as well.

Put simply, none of the categories of traditional class analysis adequately describes the ‘aspirational’ class. Does that mean the history of classes can offer no clues as to its meaning or importance? Not at all. In fact, the emergence of the term follows a *highly familiar* pattern in class mobilisation. Even if the label is unfamiliar, the process of identification that produced it has been witnessed many times before.

had transformed the traditional Australian character. Struggle, egalitarianism and independence were all disappearing – “smothered in the T-bones and television of the welfare state”.⁴⁵ Riches, in short, had made radicalism rare.

By the 1960s, these observations had become a sociological cliché. The problem of the ‘affluent worker’ loomed as a major research question.⁴⁶ The supposed existence of ‘embourgeoisment’ provoked angry polemical exchanges.⁴⁷ Before aspirationals, there was affluence; before affluence, there was ‘respectability’. The division between the ‘rough’ and the ‘respectable’ in inter-war working-class communities has often been noted. It describes an equivalent segmentation of jobs, incomes and cultural habits. The respectable working class also aspired.⁴⁸ Before respectability, there was ‘aristocracy’. Students of the nineteenth-century labour movement have frequently identified a stratum of skilled workers that enjoyed greater income than their fellows and (perhaps) also proclaimed a set of distinctive values. These workers formed an ‘aristocracy of labour’. Radical intellectuals have long disputed its form, origins and political import.⁴⁹ Before the ‘aristocracy’, there were the ‘strivers’. Henry Mayhew’s first writings about the modern working class identified the “striving” poor as a distinctive category of the urban landscape of the 1850s.⁵⁰



In sum, the working class has always been fractured. Mobility and division is neither remarkable nor novel. The ‘aspirational’ worker is a newish label for an old phenomenon. It is also inadequate. As we have seen, it oscillates between the universality of a verb (the activity of ‘aspiration’) and the specificity of a solid noun (a particular sector of contemporary society). It is usually unspecified (a free-floating label) or over-specified (a thick description of jobs, tastes, attitudes and habits). The differences between small-business people and skilled blue-collar employees (both officially ‘aspirational’) are typically overlooked. The linking of ‘aspiration’ with a particular social grouping is both insulting and distortive.

Does that mean that the ‘aspirational’ have nothing to teach us? Not in my view. Somewhat paradoxically, the ubiquity of the label demonstrates the continuing importance of class divisions. ‘Aspirational’ are associated with mobility and (for their champions) with the healthy dynamism of contemporary life. Logically, such mobility should lead to freedom *from* class: the upward movement of individuals must make the categories of traditional class analysis outmoded. Class society should, so the argument goes, be succeeded by an individualised society of employees.⁵¹ Clearly, however, this has

not occurred. The apparent mobility of ‘aspirational workers’ has simply produced a *new kind* of social categorisation. ‘Aspirational’ have not escaped class identification; they have instead been fixed with a new kind of label. A class by another name still constrains as tightly. Those who use the ‘aspirational’ to proclaim the myth of classlessness serve merely to propagate a new kind of class analysis.

Whatever its undoubted weaknesses, the primary contribution of this analysis also deserves attention. One hundred and fifty years ago, Friedrich Engels confidently announced the disappearance of the lower middle class.⁵² Today, the persistence of divisions and layers is far more obvious. In an environment where consumption is a major shaper of identity,⁵³ this is likely to remain so. In-between groupings are not marginal. Whether ‘aspirational’, ‘affluent’, ‘respectable’, ‘aristocratic’, ‘striving’, ‘lower-middle’, or ‘forgotten’, they form a relatively permanent place in the class structure.

The views (and aspirations) of these groups are not necessarily conservative or grasping. Members of the lower middle class led the Chartist movement for democracy;⁵⁴ the clerical salariat proselytised for socialism;⁵⁵ and the independent miners of Eureka hatched a rebellion.⁵⁶ Jack Lang was a real estate

agent; John Curtin a journalist. In truth, those who dwell ‘in-between’ have often contributed to radical political change. Perhaps, if those dubbed the ‘aspirationalists’ are ever allowed to find their own voices, this may happen once more.

1. This should not need socialscientific backing. However, it was the strong finding of: Sylvia R. McMillan, ‘Aspirations of Low-Income Mothers’, *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 29:2, 1967, pp.282–87.
2. Brian Toohey, ‘Labor’s aspirational class breaks the battler’s mould’, *AFR*, 5 May 2001, p.24.
3. Tony Walker, ‘Parties gasping over aspirational voters’, *AFR*, 19 January 2001, p.75.
4. David Burchell, ‘Why Latham failed to inspire aspirationalists’, *AFR*, 8 January 2005, p.62.
5. *ibid.*
6. Mark Latham, *From the Suburbs*, Pluto Press Australia, Annandale, 2003, p.67.
7. The December edition of *Workers Online*, cited in: Latham, *From the Suburbs*, p.68.
8. Burchell, ‘Why Latham failed to inspire aspirationalists’.
9. Greg Daniel, cited in Tony Walker, ‘Parties gasping over aspirational voters’, *AFR*, 19 January 2001, p.75.
10. John Howard, ‘Younger people now are more aspirational’, *SMH*, 7 August 2004.
11. Michelle Grattan and Kate Cox, ‘Scheme shows our “aspirational” spirit: PM’, *SMH*, 18 October 1999, p.8.
12. Deirdre Macken, ‘Socio-economics of the name game’, *AFR*, 16 June 2005, p.26.
13. *Warren’s Consumer Electronics Daily* 4:58.
14. George Megalogenis, ‘Home-blown economy’, *Australian*, 26 March 2005, p.28.
15. ‘Question schedule’, Australian survey of social attitudes. Special thanks to Shaun Wilson for permission to cite.
16. The term was used to separate Tony Blair’s ‘New Labour’ from its older versions. For example, Julie Langdon, ‘Enter Tony Blair’s Labour, Party of the Aspirational’, *Guardian*, 8 August 1994, p.18.
17. This was the particular view of John Della Bosca. See Walker, ‘Parties gasping over aspirational voters’.
18. Mark Latham, cited in Burchell, ‘Why Latham failed to inspire aspirationalists’.
19. His book *From the Suburbs* is the most obvious expression of this move.
20. For useful analyses of the former term, see Verity Burgmann, ‘Latham’s ladder’, *Arena Magazine* 69, 2004, pp.28–30.
21. This is the title of one of David Burchell’s post-election analytical pieces: *AFR*, 8 January 2005, p.62.
22. A recent example is Helen Razer, ‘Can’t buy no satisfaction’, *SMH*, 11 July 2005.
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30. This point is actually made by Latham, *From the Suburbs*, p.81.

31. The first use of the ‘lower middle class’ identified in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is from 1852.
32. Arlene Young, ‘Virtue Domesticated: Dickens and the Lower Middle Class’, *Victorian Studies* 39:4, 1996, p.484; Geoffrey Crossick (ed.), *The Lower Middle Class in Britain 1870–1914*, Croom Helm, London, 1977, p.14.
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35. Rita Felski, ‘Nothing to Declare: Identity, Shame, and the Lower Middle Class’, *PMLA* 115:1, January 2000, p.40.
36. Arlene Young, ‘Virtue Domesticated’, p.490.
37. Peter Bailey, ‘White Collars, Gray Lives?’, p.281.
38. This is from the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition.
39. Rita Felski, ‘Why academics don’t study the lower middle class’, *Chronicle of Higher Education* 48:20, 25 January 2002, p.824.
40. Rita Felski argues that this view of the lower middle class is particularly associated with the early writings of George Orwell. See her ‘Nothing to Declare’, p.35.
41. Cameron, ‘Language: The accents of politics’, pp.93–96.
42. Brian Fitzpatrick, ‘Questionnaire 28 January 1957’, *Brian Fitzpatrick Papers*, NLA MS4965, Series 13, Box 52, n.p.
43. V.G. Childe, ‘Australia today is far from a socialist society’ [1957], *Labour History* 58, 1990, p.100.
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MY BROTHER 'JIHAD JACK'

Les Thomas tells the story of his brother's ordeal as one of the first Australians to be charged under the federal government's anti-terrorism laws.

IT'S OFTEN BEEN SAID that the world changed on 11 September 2001. For my family the changes have been more profound than most. Five days after those horrific incidents, some friends and I joined a 3000-strong demonstration in Melbourne's City Square to call for restraint as the United States prepared to seek vengeance for the attacks by waging a "war against terror" with the first target being Afghanistan. Christian, Jewish and Muslim leaders addressed the crowd urging against the use of military might as the first solution to a problem we were yet to come to terms with. I'd attended many rallies before for many different causes, but I had a very personal reason for being at this one. I knew that my brother, a Muslim convert staying in the Afghan-Pakistan border region, would be at risk when the bombs started to fall.

Almost four years later, my older brother, Jack Thomas, faces the prospect of spending the rest of his life in jail under anti-terror legislation introduced after those tragic events. If the name Jack Thomas doesn't ring a bell, you may be aware of the media's favourite nickname for him, 'Jihad Jack'. In fact, Jack has never taken to calling himself this. For your average Australian it's a name that immediately conjures up impressions of a Muslim fanatic, intent on waging holy war against the West. It's also a name that threatens the possibility of my brother receiving a fair trial if the case ever goes before a jury. This hasn't stopped supposedly respectable newspapers like the *Age* and the *Australian* or even the ABC News from letting their imaginations run wild over the story of 'Jihad Jack'. Many would expect the tabloids

to carry on in this way, but in our experience the 'quality' media have been even more inclined to play up the 'Jihad Jack' myth. During newscasts, every commercial station plays the same stock footage of an al-Qaeda training camp in Afghanistan featuring balaclava-clad men blasting holes in targets with high-powered weapons. In spite of giving newspapers photographs that properly resemble my brother, they often use less flattering images where Jack's face has been contorted by tears or he's been caught off guard by photographers. These representations go a long way in constructing a negative image of my brother, but the person we know and love bears no resemblance to the myth we read about in the papers or have fed to us by the television news. We knew the 'Jihad Jack' myth had truly been planted in the public consciousness when Eddie McGuire asked a contestant on *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*:

Suspected of associating with the terrorist network al-Qaeda, Joseph Terrence Thomas was dubbed what? (a) Jihad Jack, (b) Joe Blow, (c) Terror Terry, (d) Thomas the Tank Buster.

I wasn't watching at the time but I'm told the contestant barely had to think before asking Eddie to lock it in for \$1000.

Nine years ago, Jack embraced Islam at the Newport Mosque. There, Jack adopted the Muslim name Jihad, meaning to strive to better oneself before God. In its most direct translation the word Jihad means to struggle. In the Islamic tradition into which Jack was integrating himself, the emphasis is on spiritual struggle but this is often lost in the Western media's



Jack at home with daughter Amatullah

usual interpretation: holy war. Jihad was and still is a fairly common male name throughout the Muslim world, that had the advantage of sharing the same initial as his given name. A friend suggested Jamal, meaning beautiful, but Jack said he couldn't accept a name like that, with his looks.

At the time of his conversion, the rest of the family and I struggled to come to terms with Jack's decision. Being a staunch atheist, I was deeply annoyed by what I thought was Jack's newfound holier-than-thou, fundamentalist attitude and my annoyance often burst out into heated arguments. Back then, I was completely ignorant of the rich tradition of culture and learning that made the Muslim world a crucible of knowledge while Europe was in the Dark Ages. In spite of this, I could see Jack had found a profound sense of meaning and peace in his new religion. Whatever philosophical differences we had, I was never prepared to let them come between our love for each other.

Five years later in early 2001, Jack set off with his Indonesian-born Muslim wife, Maryati, and baby daughter, Amatullah, for Pakistan and Afghanistan to see for himself what an Islamic society looked like, with the intention of possibly living there. Calls had been put out by Islamic leaders asking Muslims to go to Afghanistan to help rebuild the country after decades of war. Jack wasn't satisfied with media reports in the West depicting the Taliban as a cruel and barbaric regime and, in his naivety, he felt that he

should help them to build a genuine and benevolent Islamic republic. At that time the Taliban, the formally recognised government of Afghanistan, were engaged in a civil war with the Northern Alliance who had a toehold over 5 per cent of the country. What Jack did or did not do, and the people he met in Pakistan and Afghanistan, are the subject of the charges laid against him. Jack is to stand trial this year in the Supreme Court in relation to these charges. Until then we are prohibited from going into any great detail about this time in Jack's life.

Since returning home, Jack has said that he was disillusioned by what he saw in Afghanistan and disagrees with the cruelty the Taliban imposed on the people of Afghanistan.

Jack heard about the events of September 11 via BBC radio and called us a few hours later after travelling to a telephone exchange. Jack expressed his shock and disbelief at what had happened, to our father, Ian. Jack made his way back to Pakistan while the US and its allies prepared to invade Afghanistan. From there he saw the US invasion of Afghanistan and knew that many people were being shipped off to Guantanamo Bay or worse. Maryati decided it would be best if she took their baby to Indonesia to stay with her family on Sulawesi. In December, reports started to appear in the Australian press identifying Jack as someone who'd been in Afghanistan and who the authorities wanted to talk to. Unsure whether he would ever see his family again, Jack was way over



Jack, 12 (left) with brother Les, 11



Another dodgy headline courtesy of the *Australian*

his head in a terrifying situation. When he eventually summoned the courage to get on a plane to come back home in early January 2003 he was arrested at the Karachi airport. It's my belief that had Jack felt he had done something wrong it is doubtful that he would have tried to get on that plane using his own passport, under his own name.

During his first two weeks of incarceration, Jack was held by the Pakistani authorities, without charge and with no contact with any Australian officials or with his family. It is known that he was interrogated by American and other agencies, as well as by the Australian Federal Police and ASIO – without access to a lawyer and without ever being charged.

That whole time he was held in solitary confinement in tiny prison cells with barely any human contact. Eventually, Jack was allowed consular access and the chance to call his family. We wrote furiously to try to keep Jack's spirits up because it was clear he was enduring enormous suffering and we were concerned about his psychological state.

Five months later, Jack was released without charge. Rob Stary, Jack's lawyer, and I were at Melbourne airport to greet him. He came off the plane looking dishevelled and pale but obviously very happy and emotional to be back with his family. A group of about eight Federal Police kept watch but no attempt was made to arrest him or charge him upon his return.

Back home, Jack had frequent nightmares and was more withdrawn than the Jack we'd always known. After nine months his second daughter was born. Jack worked long shifts trying to earn enough money to buy a house of their own. He said he knew he was being watched but he didn't

care because he had not done anything wrong. If he had wronged anybody it was his family, by putting himself in a dangerous situation. He fully realised that things could have turned out much worse and felt lucky to be back home with loved ones. As the months passed, the family felt that the nightmare was finally over and that we could concentrate on living pleasantly uneventful lives.

On 18 November 2004, the day he was intending to put a deposit on a house, Jack was woken when a combined team of Federal Police and Terror Task Force Police came crashing through the front door of his Werribee residence with machine guns and barking german shepherds. The media had been tipped off in an AFP press release earlier to allow them to have their cameras rolling as the action unfolded. Simultaneously, police swooped on my parents' Williamstown home as they were backing out of the driveway.

Later that day, Jack was charged in the Melbourne Magistrates' Court with receiving money from al-Qaeda, providing support to al-Qaeda and travelling on a false passport. He'd been advised to keep his head down in the dock so the courtroom artists were forced to use their imaginations in rendering an image of him. Most of their drawings in the papers the next day showed a sinister looking man of Middle Eastern appearance with a large hooked nose and sunken eyes that looked nothing like Jack but fitted the image of the Arab terrorist we've all seen in so many movies.

That night on the news my father watched in disgust as Steve Bracks, who he'd dutifully supported by handing out how-to-vote cards on each polling day, lauded the efforts of the state and federal

counter-terrorism police. Only days before the arrest, Bracks had shaken my father's hand and asked how the family was going.

Jack soon found himself in the maximum security Acacia Unit of Barwon Prison, sixty-five kilometres outside of Melbourne. There he was locked down in his cell for more than twenty-two hours a day. Once a week he was allowed a 'box visit' from family where he'd be separated by a thick glass panel. The isolation and surroundings forced him to relive the traumas he'd suffered in Pakistan. One psychologist described it as "secondary torture".

Jack had been deprived of his right, spelt out in the *Crimes Act 1914*, to communicate with a lawyer. I believe in their desperation to please their political masters the AFP went ahead with an illegal interview knowing that they were in contravention of his rights but feeling like they could get away with it.

During Jack's committal hearing, Melbourne radio station 3CR received a visit from three AFP agents with a warrant to seize the tape of an interview Rob Stary had done live to air. The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance described the raid as media intimidation. In our view, the raid was de-

Jack was woken when a combined team of Federal Police and Terror Task Force Police came crashing through the front door . . . with machine guns and barking german shepherds.

Two unsuccessful attempts were made to get him out on bail, first in the Magistrates' Court and then in the Supreme Court. The federal government, in June 2004, had introduced new bail requirements for people facing terror related charges to place the onus on defendants to prove "exceptional circumstances" warranting bail. We were greatly relieved when on our third attempt Chief Magistrate Ian Gray granted bail, on 15 February 2005, citing Jack's co-operation with the authorities and his mental deterioration. Jack's psychiatrist, Professor Patrick McGorry, a leading authority on the treatment of torture survivors, said that trying to treat Jack in Barwon would be like "trying to treat a malaria sufferer in a mosquito infested swamp". My parents put up their house as surety and Jack was required to report to police twice daily. Most importantly bail meant Jack could get proper psychiatric treatment. Since then he's been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder and depressive anxiety.

During the hearings, the AFP said that Jack had been the subject of constant surveillance over a seventeen-month period and he wasn't found doing anything unlawful. The prosecution tried to use this fact against Jack, inviting judges and magistrates to conclude he was a 'sleeper agent' for al-Qaeda instead of someone just trying to get on with life.

Earlier on, the prosecution had been forced to concede that their case would "stand or fall" on the basis of a single AFP interview taken in March 2003 while Jack was detained in Pakistan. In this interview

signed to stop Rob Stary from speaking out publicly on Jack's behalf.

In response to my brother's situation, I and some concerned friends initiated the 'Justice for Jack' campaign to draw attention to the civil liberties implications of Jack's case and to build support for our petition to have the charges withdrawn by the Director of Public Prosecutions. So far, the most prominent signatory is Noam Chomsky who has said:

The actions of the Australian government in pursuing Jack Thomas suggest that they are willing to trample on basic civil and human rights in the name of the 'war on terror'. Australians should be alarmed.

Right now the family doesn't know where this story will end but we realise it's a story that may have significant consequences for others in future. Should Jack be convicted on the basis of the evidence being used, we fear it would set an appalling precedent. We don't want others to be denied their right to communicate with a lawyer. Nor do we want torture and duress to become an accepted part of the Australian legal system. That's why we think it's so important that the media pay close attention to my brother's case; not to paint crude, inaccurate caricatures but to look into the actual details of the case and the political motivations behind it. Already some reporters are starting to grasp these issues. In the meantime, this family will continue to fight for justice for Jack.

Find more information at www.justice4jack.com

THE SKELETON IN THE CLOSET

Gwenda Tavan: *The long, slow death of White Australia*
(Scribe Publications, \$32.95)

Gwenda Tavan's *The long, slow death of White Australia* is an important and timely book. Lucidly written and based on meticulous research, it traces the erosion of Australia's race-based approach to immigration.

Tavan usefully defines the White Australia policy as embodying "a complex set of legislative and administrative measures aimed at severely restricting non-European immigration". The policy reflected, writes Tavan, "the desire to create a sovereign, modern, white British Nation state". An ideology of racial determinism provided its rationale, and despite the fact that controversy dogged it from the outset, the policy remained ascendant until the 1950s, and to some extent beyond that time.

The bulk of the book concerns the postwar years when the process of dismantling the policy began in earnest. While academically based, Tavan's study reads like a slow-boiling thriller. There is a gradual build-up of pressure towards change and a cast of hundreds including commentators, journalists, academics and senior bureaucrats, such as Peter Richard Heydon, the arch gradualist and long-time head of the Immigration Department.

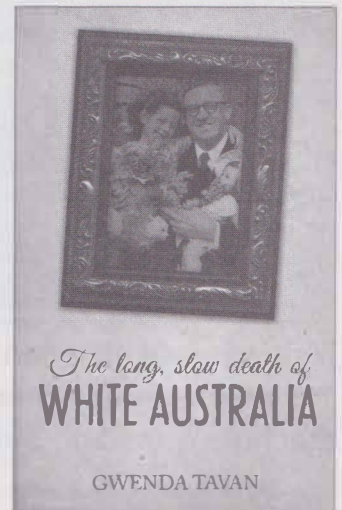
Tavan touches upon the actions of individuals who, with hindsight, can be seen as visionaries. In 1947, Methodist minister Reverend Alan Walker published a pamphlet in which he argued against the White Australia policy on both intellectual and

moral grounds at a time when it was fully endorsed by most Australians. Walker believed that the policy had helped shape, in his words, a 'parochial' Australian soul. A new policy that did not discriminate on the grounds of colour or race would, said Walker, allow more Australians to know nationals of other lands, and would "deepen our emotional life, extend the range of our imagination and give new horizons to our mind".

Another forward thinker, Melbourne University economics lecturer and future deputy leader of the ALP, Jim Cairns, wrote in the *Argus* newspaper in June 1954 that Australia "could be a bridge, geographically and spiritually between East and West". He pointed out that the White Australia policy was "the main obstruction" to such a bridge.

Tavan's cast includes Hubert Opperman, the Minister of Immigration at the end of the Menzies era who pushed for reform against a reluctant prime minister, and the irrepressible Don Dunstan, premier of South Australia, who lived and breathed his cosmopolitan outlook and pressed his party to translate it into policy. The Immigration Reform Group, formed circa 1960 by middle-class professionals such as Melbourne University academics James Mackie and Kenneth Rivett, spawned immigration reform associations Australia-wide.

Tavan also documents the rearguard action in defence of the policy, led by organisations such as the



Returned Servicemen's League, the Australian Natives Association and the Australian Workers Union, which continued to see immigration in terms of the need to protect Australian jobs.

Arthur Calwell, the ALP Minister for Immigration who ushered in the mass European migration of the postwar years, emerges as a complex figure. I recall, as a child, attending Jewish gatherings where Calwell was hailed as a hero for his efforts. Yet he could not stomach the thought of non-European migration. In one parliamentary debate he calls out angrily: "You can have a White Australia or a black Australia but a mongrel Australia is impossible."

This gut fear of racial mixing is reflected in the arguments of the Immigration Control Association. Formed in the wake of significant 1966 reforms, the Association clung to racial determinist ideas: "History has repeatedly proved that mixing people of different race and colour almost inevitably leads to racial tension, disharmony and bloodshed", the group asserted. "Therefore we deplore all attempts to mix different racial groups. We deplore miscegenation and hybridisation of the human racial groups, and condemn all attempts to create conditions which lead to hybridisation."

It is hard to believe, in retrospect, that in the 1950s new rules required that 'mixed race' people could only be admitted to Australia if they could provide genealogies that proved they had either three European grandparents or two European grandparents and two 'half-caste'. This is how it was not so long ago.

The most impressive aspect of Tavan's study is the way in which she presents detailed changes, however small, within broader international and domestic contexts, so that by the time White Australia is finally abolished by the Whitlam government in the early 1970s, she can write:

While some people interpreted Whitlam's pledge to abandon the White Australia policy as radical, the reality is that it represented a pragmatic response to changing international and domestic circumstances that made it almost impossible to sustain a racially discriminatory immigration policy.

These pressures included the creation of newly independent Asian states such as India and Indonesia, and the postwar successes of anti-colonial movements worldwide. The White Australia policy was, at least at the governmental level, finally abandoned by the

actions of both ALP and Coalition governments in the 1970s. Whitlam and Fraser were the first Australian prime ministers to fully embrace a non-discriminatory immigration policy and the ideal of multiculturalism.

While falling beyond the parameters of Tavan's study, it is worth mentioning a number of forces that can be added to her impressive mix. While assimilation and the ideal of homogeneity endured as the norm into the postwar years, many immigrants nevertheless practiced what I would call a de facto multiculturalism well before it became endorsed government policy.

The Yiddish-speaking community for example founded a Yiddish theatre in Melbourne in 1909, Yiddish and Hebrew schools and a range of institutions that enabled them to maintain a bridge to their past, whilst adjusting to realities of the new world. Similarly, Greek, Italian and other immigrant communities built schools, sponsored theatres, set up societies, churches and so on. So important were the bonds of the past, many immigrants created clubs based on a particular island, region or city. My father was a member of the now defunct Bialystok Centre, in which he regularly met with other immigrants from his native city.

Aboriginal rights movements also existed in various forms from the time of dispossession and invasion to the present day, and included many Indigenous leaders who strove to maintain pride in their decimated cultures, at a time when they were cruelly excluded, even from the right to vote. They remained defiant against great odds.

Tavan's account helps place Prime Minister Howard's approach to immigration in perspective. After almost a decade in power we can see the degree to which Howard has wound back the clock. Indeed, before *Tampa* appeared on the horizon, the Coalition Government had already cut benefits to migrants, cut the numbers of the annual refugee intake and family reunion schemes, and cut support to multicultural institutions. Howard also gave tacit support to the anti-Aboriginal and anti-Asian views of Pauline Hanson and in 1999, introduced Temporary Protection visas for asylum seekers found to be genuine refugees, rather than offering permanent visas, as had been the case until then.

As Tavan points out, while White Australia has been officially abolished, race still remains "the proverbial skeleton in the closet". In his early years

in power Howard became adept, as Tavan would put it, at “encoding racial concepts in more socially accepted terms”. This included terms such as the ‘neglected majority’ and the implication that some people, especially Aboriginal groups and migrants, were getting special treatment.

Australia became the only Western country with indefinite long-term mandatory detention, a system that has driven some detainees to madness and the brink of suicide. By October 2001, Prime Minister Howard was able to declare, in the wake of the Children Overboard affair, “I do not want people like that in Australia”.

There is another side of the contemporary story: the efforts of individuals who have promoted a more inclusive vision of Australian society at a time when asylum seekers have been denied their basic human rights. Among politicians they include Liberal dissidents Petro Georgiou and Judi Moylan, the Australian Democrats’ Andrew Bartlett, Greens Senators Kay Nettle and Bob Brown, and the ALP’s Carmen Lawrence, who has written submissions on the mental effects of indefinite detention and been a tireless refugee advocate.

The new bridge-builders include organisations such as Rural Australians for Refugees and support groups throughout the country. In Melbourne they include the Fitzroy Learning Network, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, the Hotham Mission and the Victorian Foundation for the Survivors of Torture, among many others. They encompass the many Australians who have sent letters of support to detainees in outback centres such as Port Hedland and Baxter, offshore centres in Nauru and Christmas Island, and city centres such as Villawood and Maribyrnong.



These individuals have forged enduring friendships between cultures and faiths at a time when, in the wake of 11 September 2001, they are sorely needed. They have in turn become welcome guests in the homes of new arrivals from Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries, and gained a deeper understanding of their cultures.

Perhaps, one day, we will again have a prime minister who can fully embrace an inclusive and pluralist society based on the recognition that we are, in essence, a land of Indigenous peoples and immigrants, a new world with an ancient past. Meanwhile we rely on the efforts of advocates and support groups with an alternative vision. We also need perceptive studies like Gwenda Tavan’s to learn of the hard-won reforms that took Australia beyond the racially based policies of the past.

Arnold Zable is a Melbourne author and refugee advocate whose most recent novel, *Scraps of Heaven* (Text, 2004), depicts the postwar immigrant community of Carlton.

Faces

It’s the faces in the background
that say so much more
when the famous
politician is speaking.

PETER MURPHY

War Syllogism

war makes killing *freeing*.
everyone wants freedom.

everyone wants killing.

S.J. HOLLAND-BATT

GWENDA TAVAN

Dr Gwenda Tavan, who teaches politics at La Trobe University, Melbourne, recently published *The Long, Slow Death of White Australia* (Scribe 2005). She speaks of experiences that led to her present research interests. Her book is reviewed by **Arnold Zable** on page 14.



EARLY IN MY postgraduate days I was struck by what appeared to be two very dichotomous images of Australia – the bad old days of White Australia, and the good, contemporary multicultural Australia of the post-1970 period. There was something jarring about the fact that we had these two very contrasting images. This got me thinking about how, when, why, that transition had taken place.

As a first-generation Australian, the daughter of Italian immigrants, I was very well aware that the two such images were somehow interrelated. My life experiences (and later, my research) suggested to me that the changes have never been as concrete, nor as clear-cut as some representations seem to suggest. That was what first attracted me to the topic and eventually I tried to map the changes that had taken place, to understand the nature of the changes, the processes that had taken place and to evaluate what had changed and to what extent. The project took on a life of its own, leading to the publication of my book *The Long Slow Death of White Australia*.

GROWING UP IN SUBURBAN MELBOURNE

My mother, who comes from southern Italy, arrived in Melbourne in 1959, aged 19. She was the youngest in her family and came out to join two sisters and two brothers who were already here. Her idea was

to make some money and eventually return to Italy. My father, from northern Italy, arrived in 1961, with two friends. His motivation was to “have an adventure, earn some money”. My parents met in a factory where they both worked and married after a quite short courtship. I was born in June 1963 and two brothers followed in 1966 and 1971.

We lived in North Carlton until I was 9. We returned to Italy for nine months in 1968. My mother hoped to stay there permanently, but my dad felt work conditions and pay were better here in Australia. I still remember our time in Italy even though I was 4. Those memories are very dear to me, inspiring strong feelings of nostalgia.

I remember life in North Carlton with mixed feelings. My parents seemed to have a lot of friends then. There was certainly a sense of being part of a larger community, family, friends, and happy memories of picnics, parties, church, playing with friends in the street. There were bad memories too. My mother had a nervous breakdown when I was 5 years old. The experience was very traumatic for me, and the aftermath profoundly unsettling for the whole family. My mother was not the same afterwards and I lost my sense of safety and security. She has battled with depression ever since. Meanwhile most of her siblings had returned to Italy, leaving her isolated and lonely.

Also, my father worked long hours for many years, creating further tension with his absence.

Life in North Carlton became increasingly scary for me. Those were pre-gentrification days and there were a lot of larrikins, who we called bodgies, who lived nearby. They used to drive their cars really fast and I saw one of them steal a car once. Very scary! I begged my parents constantly to move us somewhere safe.

But there were also rays of sunshine. There was a teacher who lived next door. She took me under her wing, introduced me to music and books, and would take me out for excursions.

At 9 we finally moved to a housing estate in Reservoir. This proved to be a bleak and terrible experience, especially for my mother. The place was a cultural and social wasteland. People were not very friendly. There were no shops, no public transport, and not even sewerage, but the house was modern and new, and this was seen as important. My mother became very isolated. My father was absent for up to twelve hours a day. There were no schools nearby so we were bussed in every day. My life at the new school was unpleasant. I don't recall having any set friends while there, probably partly because I wasn't a local girl.

RACISM, XENOPHOBIA – EARLY ENCOUNTERS

My first memory of racism was in Grade 3 when someone called me a dago. I still remember the name of the girl who called me that. I felt ashamed though I didn't really know what a dago was. I don't recall ethnicity being a primary issue in those early years, probably because there were many Italians in Carlton.

Racism and xenophobia became a real problem after we moved to Reservoir. There were many migrant kids in the area and though we mixed a lot, Italians were very clearly near the bottom of the pecking order. There were a lot of Maltese in the area and they seemed hostile to Italians. (I clearly remember a burning sense of shame and anger when the mother of one kid I was playing with called out to her daughter “not to play with those bloody wogs”. My dad said if she said it again I should say ‘hello sister’ to her. It's quite funny looking back, because the lady was very clearly of Mediterranean origin herself!)

High school would prove to be a quite traumatic

experience. The school in Fawkner was pretty rough. There were about a thousand kids there. Those were the days of Skinheads and Sharps. I was quite isolated for the first two years with no set girlfriends. I recall being on my own a lot. This was partly my own fault I suspect. I was very conscious of who was ‘in’ and who was ‘out’. I refused to hang out with the ‘outs’, most of whom were migrant kids, though I wasn't accepted by the ‘ins’ (nearly all Anglos) either. I became the target of both physical and verbal abuse in Year 7. This lasted for about two years. Much of it was racially based, with some Anglo girls spitting on me, punching me, and leaving racist graffiti on my locker. Looking back, it may have been partly inspired by jealousy. I was pretty and smart, boys liked me, as did some teachers, and despite my problems, I was quite confident in my ideas. In other words, I was an ‘uppity wog’, which is the worst kind. Things were very tough.

It was about this time that I completely rejected my Italian ethnicity. I stopped speaking Italian and I anglicised all my family members' names. I still have an essay I wrote about my family in Year 7. Gwendalina became Gwendoline. Anna, Luciano, Gino and Domenic became Anne, Lou, Jean and Mickey. Needless to say, I feel very sad for that young girl who denied so much that was worthwhile about herself and her family.

In my teens I was very rebellious, and self-destructive. I think this reflected a lot of self-loathing. It was a feeling of shame about my migrant background, and a desperate desire to belong to the Anglo mainstream. (I recall daydreaming about what it would be like being part of a normal Australian family.) Unhappy as I was, I couldn't imagine any other world than the one I was in. My mother was always threatening to take us back to Italy. I feared this, having internalised all the stories about dirty wogs. I imagined it would be a fate worse than death.

Books were in many respects my only escape. According to family members, I was always reading. I remember *Jane Eyre* was a firm favourite, which is not surprising in hindsight (it is about a girl who lives on the margins of her society, but whose integrity and courage allow her to make her way in the world). I also took comfort from the support of various teachers over the years who saw some potential in me. Most were English and History teachers, the subjects I enjoyed most at school.

TURNING POINTS

Some major changes happened when I was 15. I met a very nice young boy named Robert at a party. He was smart, kind, respectful. We became very good friends. Things became better at school.

I had a boyfriend, not Robert, who was very popular and this allowed me to wangle my way into the coolest group of girls at school (all Anglos). We became good friends, even though I remained conscious of my difference. I actually became quite popular and all the kids who'd made my life miserable a few years earlier became more respectful. Though a ratbag at school (I was absent a lot and very disruptive), I managed to retain the support of my teachers because of my academic skills.

When I was 16, Robert and I fell in love and began a very intense relationship. I was very reliant on him because so many other aspects of my life were unravelling. Despite my academic skills, I couldn't focus on study and dropped out at 16, but was unable to get work. I spent all my time with Robert and he ended up dropping out of university as well.

My family accepted our relationship at first because they knew Robert and liked him. There appeared to be no concerns about his ethnic background. My parents had come to accept that I was 'Anglo-oriented'. However, my mother became increasingly concerned at the level of intensity of my relationship with Robert and tried to break us up. Home life became increasingly unbearable and I left home at 17 to live with Robert and his family.

Rob's parents accepted me because he was clearly in love with me. But they were understandably concerned about my close association with him, and (probably rightly) believed that we were too young to be so serious. My ethnicity was never directly mentioned to me though their ambivalent feelings about migrants weren't hidden either. Robert's outlook was quite different from his parents. He went to school with migrant kids all his life and has always been very open-minded about people.

LIVING AND LEARNING

My real life began when I turned 21. I married Robert, returned to study and visited Italy when I was 23. Italy allowed me to rediscover my roots, my extended family and reclaim a big part of myself (as well as my language skills). It remains a very important place for me, not least because it is a reminder of the other ways my life might have turned out.

I enrolled to study at La Trobe University, Melbourne, when I was 25. I've always thought of it as a sort of homecoming. I rediscovered my love of writing and learning. I gained a capacity to articulate and explain the problems my family and I had experienced while I was growing up. University life also offered me a haven from the hard culture I grew up in. Here I met other like-minded people who had experienced or were interested in marginality. The rest, as they say, is history . . .

Reflecting back, my experiences of prejudice and racism while growing up affected me profoundly. I developed deep feelings of insecurity, difference, marginality and restlessness, as well as a deep-seated need to belong. On a more positive note, those experiences also provided me with a will to succeed, strong commitment to living an authentic life, and, I like to think, a sensitivity to the plight of the marginalised amongst us.

Academically, my experiences, and the experiences of my parents, have no doubt prompted my interest in issues of Australian national identity, racism, migration, and the like. These interests go back a long way. I can remember writing a creative story when I was 16 which was about the migrant experience. It has to be said though that subsequently I have focused largely on issues of Australian identity and attitudes, rather than the migrant experience. I think this interest reflects a long-standing sense of marginality, of being on the outside looking in, and of wanting to understand this society so I can find a way of fitting in. Nevertheless, feelings of marginality provide a vantage point for reading the culture and for observing the myriad, subtle and complex ways in which power relations are played out.

My sense of marginality in Australia, the country of my birth, led to a need to understand what makes Australia tick and to chart the even more overt marginality of non-Europeans, e.g. Asians, in Australia. I recall that in my fourth year at university I wrote an essay analysing a series of short stories written in the late nineteenth century which were about Anglo-Chinese relations on the goldfields. That was my first (somewhat clumsy) attempt at understanding the psycho-dynamics of Australian racism. It may also be that the issue provided me with a degree of emotional distance I couldn't have had if I had focused on something closer to home, e.g. Italians.

In the mid 1990s I was hopeful, believing that Paul Keating had a vision for Australia and that his

assertive stance on issues of race was having a healing effect not just for Indigenous people or people like myself, but for the country as a whole. Not that I was entirely convinced. Despite his rhetoric of friendship, one could detect ongoing anxieties about Asia. Asia was no longer a racial threat, but it remained one in economic terms. The strategy to counter this threat was not that of the past, i.e. through exclusion (self-versus-other), but through integration (self-in-other). I was never convinced by the argument that multiculturalism had solved all social ills. There was plenty of evidence to suggest that a very strong assimilationist strand remained in Australian culture. Multiculturalism became a new way of achieving old ends, namely, the preservation of core Anglo values/interests, by some minor concessions to Aborigines and ethnics. Still, it has been a shock to realise how far we have regressed emotionally and politically during the Howard years.

It is too easy to exaggerate the significance of the winding down of the White Australia policy, which was in essence a moderate and inevitable liberalisation of policy in relation to non-European immigration rather than a direct challenge to strongly held beliefs about the white, British nature of Australian society and state. Could it have been otherwise, given our history and the strength of our cultural/political institutions which still privilege white, Anglo values and interests (while obscuring them behind the mask of civic idealism, and liberal-democratic principles)?

What strikes me most is our chronic ambivalence about ourselves, and thus our relations with others. We seem to be locked in a state of arrested development; unable to relinquish completely our colonial status (both a colonised and colonising people). How else do we explain the uneasy shifts in our attitudes to the rest of the world today, still oscillating madly between 'the cringe' towards the US and 'the strut' in the Asia Pacific region (to paraphrase the late A.A. Phillips)?

It does seem lately that we are only really comfortable with Asia when the power dynamics are in our favour – giving aid, helping out in a crisis, sending experts. It was only a few years ago that Howard actually publicly raised the proposal of sending five hundred young Australians to Asian countries to

do good works (thankfully, the idea came to nothing). We still seem uncomfortable with notions of Asian agency, autonomy, and tend to condemn their behaviour as barbaric or ungrateful when it doesn't conform to our standards (how dare the Indonesians have a legal system different to ours, how dare they not speak English during trials!). Our sneering and our strutting may well be a means of keeping other anxieties at bay, namely, our colonial status in relation to great, white, powerful friends, and our limited economic and strategic power in global terms.

LIFE TODAY

Today, I find myself a woman of 42, happily married with two young children and a very large mortgage. In some respects, I've never been so settled. On the other hand, I'm often prone to restlessness; the curse of the migrant who is often doomed to experiencing life ambivalently, always with a sense of dislocation – neither here, nor there; and always with a sense that life might have held other possibilities – What would I have been like if I'd grown up in Italy? Would I look different, be different? Would I be married? Would I live in the south or the north? Would I have a different political outlook?

I worry about my parents a lot more as they get older. They haven't had the benefit of extended family or church or social life to keep them connected to the broader society or culture, and most of their socialising today depends on their kids. I don't see this as entirely healthy. It saddens me.

I have found a special redemptive quality in our two children. They have linked Rob and me to each others' families in a way that wasn't possible before. I take a lot of pleasure in knowing my kids have a cultural hybridity which empowers but does not inhibit them. They have a rootedness here that I can never experience, but at the same time can still connect to their Italian heritage. Things have worked out pretty well, all in all.

The audio taped component of the interview was transcribed by Rita Camilleri, Hon. Research Fellow, Monash Asia Institute, Monash University.

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WHO'S KNOCKING NOW?

THE RISE AND FALL OF 'MULTICULTURAL' LITERATURE

LITERARY COMMUNITIES are not immune from uncivilised stoushes both on and off the page. But when the catalyst is identity politics, these tend to persist. Arguments over class, gender and sexuality can prompt a bit of literary bruising, but the tetchy grounds of race, ethnicity, and more specifically multiculturalism, invariably trigger an all-in brawl. Identifying just who or what constitutes an 'ethnic', 'multicultural', 'migrant', 'wog', 'marginal', 'minority', or 'NESB' writer or writing – who is entitled to the benefits of 'positive discrimination' – is a politically loaded task. This is well illustrated by the feisty debates that emerged in multicultural literary studies, a field that developed in the late 1970s following Whitlam's introduction of Australia's official multiculturalism policy.

That policy fostered a climate of positive discrimination that saw the 'ethnic' arts industries receive considerable financial support from government, particularly via the Australia Council and its Literature Board. As a result of this, there were concerns that writers deemed 'ethnic' or 'multicultural' were not being published by the mainstream publishers, and that if they were, their work was construed as peripheral to 'real' (predominantly Anglo) Australian literature. An informal campaign ensued. The movement's most prominent figures included Sneja Gunew, Manfred Jurgensen, Lolo Houbein, Serge Liberman and George Kanarakis. They were working towards having 'ethnic' or 'multicultural' writers both acknowledged and taken seriously by the predominantly 'Anglo' status quo of mainstream publishing and literary circles in Australia.

The 'multicultural' debates deteriorated by the mid 1990s, with the assistance of a savage, incendiary essay by Robert Dessaix: 'Nice Work If You Can Get It'.¹ After years of listening to multiculturalists campaign for an inclusive culture in Australian publishing and literature, Dessaix had reached the end of his tether. He cast the "multicultural professionals" as clusters of self-serving, self-interested academics who had constructed imaginary divides to justify their research and funding. "They're out there", he wrote, "compiling bibliographies, devising curricula, writing articles for right-thinking journals and editing damning reports."² Dessaix claimed to be motivated by concern for the writers in question:

[T]he patronising picture of a marginalising Anglo-Celtic centre and a marginalised body of ethnic writers exists only in the heads of the culture doctors and the 'cures' work for their benefits, not the writers . . . those who are upholding it are causing considerable harm to writers of non-English-speaking background.³

If Dessaix was seeking to rescue such writers, he was quick to set them adrift: "The reason so much migrant writing is 'marginalised' is that, in this basic sense, it's often not very good – and for obvious reasons: the author's English simply doesn't allow him or her to produce meaning at the same number of levels . . . as a native speaker's". He goes on to say:

I think it's time for the passengers on the ship of fools to disembark, to look around them with inter-

est and a desire to understand, to learn the language – or find a first-rate interpreter – and then to join in some of the myriad conversations already taking place in the country they’ve arrived in.⁴

The message was clear: if you want to survive, you have to save yourself. And, by the way, it’s not really an unfair system. Cooperative, English-speaking, and quintessentially deserving writers will indeed be published and granted permission to participate in literary dialogues. Those whingeing ‘multicultural professionals’ are trying to hoodwink the lot of us.

Dessaix’s view was attributed by Janet Chimonyo to his studying in Russia in the late 1960s, where he developed an anti-Marxist, anti-Communist ethos, exacerbated by “impatien[ce] at the dominance he feels the Left holds in Australian intellectual life”.⁵ As noted by Jeff Sparrow in *Overland* recently, Dessaix doesn’t take to ‘noise’, particularly if the racket is generated by strangely impassioned political types.⁶ He nevertheless triggered a ruckus in the 1990s. Gunew defended the multiculturalists’ cause in the subsequent issue of *Australian Book Review* and additional responses, by Nikos Papastergiadis, Jan Mahyuddin, Efi Hatzimanolis, Beth Spencer and K. Ruthven, were published in the lesser-known *Typereader*, journal of the Centre for Studies in Literary Education at Deakin University. But of course Dessaix’s essay wasn’t the only factor that led to the demise of the multicultural literary debates. His position was validated, through publication, precisely because of a shifting political climate. The 1990s were characterised by the intensifying backlash against political correctness, evident in the election of the Howard Government, the arrival of One Nation, in a growing resentment towards those ‘benefiting’ from the Australian welfare state (in any of its guises), and in Australian publishing and literature, the fallout that followed the Helen Demidenko/Darville revelations.

PIONEERING A NEW CULTURAL ORTHODOXY

There were numerous advocates for the multicultural writers’ cause, but Sneja Gunew’s pioneering and prolific work saw her become the public face of multicultural literary studies in Australia. As John Docker noted, Gunew was largely responsible for establishing the study and recording of ‘ethnic’ or ‘multicultural’ writing as “a new cultural ortho-

doxy”.⁷ Gunew’s interest in the field was shaped by her own experience of growing up as a migrant in Australia. She and her family moved here from Germany when she was 4, and she grew up in St Albans, a working-class suburb of Melbourne’s west. While at university Gunew realised that writing produced by ‘ethnic’ or ‘multicultural’ writers in Australia was not being held in libraries: “I started looking around for the anthologies and writings that had been done on the post-war immigrant experience, and of course there was *nothing*. Well, there was very little”.⁸ This was a peculiar absence, as she knew of many migrants who were writing in both English and another language, “but there was no official record being kept of any of this, and I became more and more aware that as people passed away so did their writing. So my main concern at the outset was to rescue these writings, to try to get them published, as well as collect them”.⁹

One of Gunew’s many initiatives, supported by figures such as Lolo Houbein, Alexandra Karakostas-Seda, Jan Mahyuddin and Wenche Ommundsen, was the establishment of the Australian Multicultural Literature Collection at Deakin University. Beyond this, Gunew and other multiculturalists continued to point to the marginalised status of ‘ethnic’ or ‘multicultural’ writers in Australia. They asserted that those of a ‘non-Anglo’ background were actively shunned by the Australian literary world, and that their work was in the main met with cold prejudice by commercial publishers.¹⁰ In struggles to obtain publishers and readerships, aspiring ‘ethnic’ or ‘multicultural’ writers in Australia would generally take their writing to overseas or local ‘ethnic’ publications. Otherwise they hoped for occasional publication in small literary journals, through self-publishing, or by establishing “small collective publishing ventures”.¹¹

The primary concerns were that mainstream Australian literature did not present an accurate reflection of the country’s increasingly diverse cultural composition, that this was not recognised by its publishing and literary communities, and that this oversight was to Australia’s economic, social and cultural detriment. As late as 1990 James Jupp wrote:

In theory there ought to be a large and growing market for books by and about ‘ethnics’ . . . Yet if the ‘ethnic market’ is potentially there, it has yet to manifest its strength sufficiently to interest the major mainstream publishing houses . . . As

migrants and ethnics form such a large part of Australian society and as Australia is and, since 1788, always has been an immigrant country, the situation outlined above means that an important part of our heritage is either overlooked or is left to minor or private publishing efforts.¹²

Before the 'ethnic bandwagon' era, few publications presented themselves as *explicitly* 'ethnic' or 'multicultural'.¹³

One exception was *They're a Weird Mob* (1955), written by Australian-born John O'Grady under the pseudonym Nino Culotta. The novel recounts the 'autobiographical' story of an Italian migrant who arrives in Sydney to work as a sports editor for an Italian-language publication run by his cousin. Nino discovers his cousin has absconded, leaving him to fend for himself in the beer-swilling land of easygoing mates. He meets the White Australian model of immigration, trying valiantly to assimilate into Australian culture with good-humoured, apolitical compliance. The novel was a bestseller; it sold over 300,000 copies in the three years that followed its publication, making it the most successful book by an Australian writer at the time.¹⁴ By 1981 it had been reprinted forty-seven times.¹⁵

Beyond this initial enthusiasm for what was essentially a parody, interest in more authentic kinds of 'ethnic' writing was growing. Between the late 1970s and the mid 1990s, around thirty state-sponsored 'ethnic' or 'multicultural' writing anthologies were published.¹⁶ Akin to the rising interest in Aboriginal writing that followed the extensive media coverage of the Stolen Generation, 'ethnic' or 'multicultural' writers and their work were beginning to receive belated attention in the wake of the government rhetoric and hyperbole that surrounded the introduction of the official multiculturalism policy.

In 1979, with the support of Al Grassby, then Commissioner for Community Relations, Dezsery Ethnic Publications released *The First Multilingual Anthology in English and Other than English*. This was a pioneering publication, the first Australian anthology published in English and the native tongues of its contributors: "It is a rock on which to build the cultural revolution which is necessary to ensure that Australia's silent voices are heard,"¹⁷ stated Grassby. His use of 'cultural revolution' indicated Grassby's desire to establish a new status quo within Australian literature and the country's broader

cultural realms. Indeed, he took pride in Australia's "seventy newspapers printed in a dozen languages" and its "broadcasting in thirty-seven languages".¹⁸ The cultural revolution, he believed, had begun. Others were not so sure.

Janis Wilton and Richard Bosworth argued that migrant writers tended to receive acclaim for having become members of, rather than for contributing something new to, the Australian literary world: "It is their status as migrants who have made it in the literary world and not their achievements as writers themselves that tends to win critical acclaim".¹⁹ Similarly, Lolo Houbein saw the burst of recognition as short-term and tokenistic gestures:

The apparent rise of ethnic literature coincides of course with the 'ethnic bandwagon' phenomenon, promoted by governments to take the lid off boiling cauldrons of frustrations, and by other levels of society for reasons ranging from genuine interest in other cultures and 'fair go' philosophy to plain self-interest where jobs and grants are concerned.²⁰

Houbein argued that in any case community groups, educational institutions, and individuals acting independently of government bodies were the real trailblazers, having done more to establish 'ethnic' or 'multicultural' literature than government.

This seems to be true. Hungarian-born Andrew Dezsery established Dezsery Ethnic Publications in Adelaide in 1975.²¹ Dezsery was hoping "not to import literature but to give those who have talent the opportunity to be published in their own language or to be published in translation, that is in English with an 'accent'".²² Dezsery Ethnic Publications published twenty-six titles: ten were in Hungarian, three were bilingual, two were anthologies and the remaining number were in English.²³ The company folded in the mid 1980s. A similar publishing company, specialising in 'ethnic' or 'multicultural' literature, was Phoenix Publications, established in 1982 in Brisbane by Angelika Fremd and Manfred Jurgensen.

In 1983, performance poet Jeltje Fanoy established the magazine *Migrant 7*, which was in print until 1986. It featured work from writers such as πo, Tes and Peter Lyssiotis, Ania Walwicz, Peter Skrzynecki, Tony Birch, Nikos Papastergiadis, Margaret Diesendorf, and Fanoy herself. The first issue's editorial echoed common sentiments expressed by multiculturalists at the time:

Are you a migrant? Are you a 1st generation migrant or a 2nd? Or 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th . . . As far as we're concerned everyone's a migrant here, everybody except for the real Australians, the people who lived here before Captain Cook even dreamt about coming here . . . (The story goes, when an anthropologist who went to Arnhem Land asked one of the Elders what this country was called before we called "Australia", the Elder replied "OURS" . . .)

A few attempts have been made in recent years to encourage a new multi-culturalism. At least people can turn on their radios now in Melbourne and Sydney and hear a different language if they happen to stray from their usual station and end up in "Ethnic Australia". There's Channel 0-28 with sub-titles. Municipal councils put on or, at least, tolerate multi-cultural festivals in the streets (because it's good for business!).

The entire question raised by migrants (their presence and effect on the landscape) is just beginning to be understood. *Migrant 7* hopes to open questions, provide its readers with an *accurate* mirror via migrants voices and not, as was more usual, via friends-of-migrants and do-gooders . . .

The first issue received much support from migrant individuals and groups, and financial donations enabled the production of its second issue.

Objections to *Migrant 7* were outlined in the second issue's editorial:

A lot of australians get upset when they see or hear about *Migrant 7*. We've been accused of 'attacking' australians, that the magazine is 'divisive' . . . we've been told that we, as australians, should 'work together' rather than emphasise our 'differences' . . . For a while I found myself apologising for the magazine, as a reflex reaction i suppose to all those years of GO HOME WHERE YOU CAME FROM IF YOU DON'T LIKE IT HERE, a kind of programmed guilt . . . But we're not really attacking australians anyway. What we are knocking (and hopefully help to knock it on the head for good, forever!) is the kind of thing put forward as being typically 'australian'. It must be embarrassing for sensitive australians to have to confront a very racist and bigotted past which was defined by the kind of typical australian identities I'm talking about, reflecting a 'purity' of race.²⁴

Migrant 7 received brief attention and support from

the pages of *Australian Book Review*. Kate Ahearne wrote: "It's all good, solid intention, and although never likely to achieve enormous circulation or critical acclaim, *Migrant Seven* [sic] slots comfortably into a niche that might otherwise remain vacant in the great multiculturalism debate".²⁵

Another journal, *Outrider*, was established in 1984, this time with the support of the Australia Council. Part of *Outrider's* editorial policy was to "extend the concept of Australian literature by presenting works of ethnic writers".²⁶ It actively promoted 'ethnic' or 'multicultural' writing, but this rarely passed without controversy and many of *Outrider's* editorial pages were devoted to defending its position as a journal for 'multicultural' literature.

Outside the realm of small press magazines and publishing, the most telling indication that 'ethnic' or 'multicultural' writing was gaining some acceptance was via the publication of such writers in agenda-setting journals such as *Meanjin* and *Southerly*. With editor Jim Davidson at the helm from 1974 to 1982, *Meanjin* worked towards a more inclusive understanding of Australian literature, and began to publish writers such as Ania Walwicz and Dimitris Tsaloumas. *Meanjin's* subsequent editors Jenny Lee and Judith Brett maintained the interest.²⁷

An important publication was *A Bibliography of Australian Multicultural Writers* (1992). This was funded by the Australian Bicentennial Multicultural Foundation, and was compiled by Sneja Gunew, Lolo Houbein, Alexandra Karakostas-Seda and Jan Mahyuddin. The bibliography was inspired by smaller ventures undertaken by Houbein between the mid 1970s and eighties.²⁸ The *Bibliography* included mainly first-generation migrant writers, writing in over thirty-eight languages other than English, but also conscientiously featured writers of second- and third-generation descent. In the 1992 bibliography, an 'ethnic' or 'multicultural' cultural identity was ascribed to any person who had migrated to Australia. Yet the bibliography demonstrates its own Eurocentric focus. Wenche Ommundsen notes it was "notoriously incomplete in the area of Asian-Australian writers and artists".²⁹

At the heart of multicultural literary debates were reservations about the real benefits and costs of 'positive' discrimination. Gunew wrote in 1988 that positive discrimination had "developed, in the last decade or more, into a powerful strategy of confrontation and resistance to racial and gender bias and

inequity in every aspect of our society, including the public arenas of writing, publishing and reading”.³⁰ Campaigners continued to push for publishers to resist both exclusion and tokenism. This could only happen once changes in broader social and political attitudes occurred. A strange and almost contradictory longing for a homogenous literary world simmered: “What a national literature would do for Australian society is a tantalising question,” writes Houbein, “but that it would be the start of a new, more homogenous cultural phase is probable. When that state of affairs has been reached we can drop the ‘ethnic’ tag and be writers unqualified”.³¹

There was always the question of who wants to be identified as an ‘ethnic’ or ‘multicultural’ writer, anyway? George Papaellinas pointed to the dangers of being marketed according to tokenistic devices: “I worry that my work has been published on the wave of a trend, and I don’t want to be on the arse-end of a trend. Particularly given that I’ve had no interest in manufacturing that trend”.³² Not many multiculturalists were altogether comfortable or especially thrilled with any kind of labelling. It was widely understood that the labels could have divisive effects. But such reservations were generally outweighed by the perceived benefits of identifying and drawing attention to those writers who were not visible to Australia’s dominant publishing and literary circles. Until, that is, the dismissive attitude expressed by Dessaix became dominant once again.

EXITING THE ARENA

The Australian multicultural literary debates appeared to end when Gunew left Australia in 1995 to take up an academic position in Canada, a decision that was in part motivated by the seemingly unrelenting opposition to herself and her work. In her *Typereader* editorial responding to Dessaix’s attack, Gunew noted that many letters occasioned by Dessaix’s argument (that the pro-multiculturalists were involved in a cynical struggle to obtain hand-outs for undeserving writers), suggested a “profound ignorance” of the area of multicultural literary studies.³³ She listed some of the achievements in the field, including the publication of the *Bibliography of Multicultural Writers*, which was “hardly a matter of marginalising the writers concerned”.³⁴ On the question of Dessaix’s tone, she wrote:

The virulence of some of the attacks and their

personal dimensions suggest that this simple act of cultural retrieval presents an enormous threat to certain people. At an institutional level it has had the compensatory effect of encouraging a number of us to work very hard to produce the bibliographies and actual collections of these ‘other’ writings so that they will be here for future researchers even if we ourselves become the casualties of prejudice.³⁵

Deakin University now has considerable holdings in its Multicultural Literature Collection which was made possible through a generous grant from the Australian Bicentennial Multicultural Foundation.

Gunew’s stance was widely supported by like-minded academics, and writers such as Mark Davis, who in 1999 wrote that the complaint of political correctness was “already a nineties cliché”.³⁶ Dessaix’s essay, he went on to say:

with its polemicising about what might happen if state sponsored multiculturalism were abandoned (equality), with its digs at grants some non-Anglo ethnics are eligible for, its underlying logic of assimilation, and its assumption that only one cultural conversation is valid, has turned out to be little more than a forerunner of what was to follow in the race debate.³⁷

But by the mid nineties Gunew felt that she was being pigeonholed, and had become one of “the casualties of prejudice”. She had also tired of feeling that the social and cultural climate in Australia offered an uphill, ostensibly unconquerable battle:

I really felt, especially in the early nineties, locked into a very reductionist position as a public intellectual on matters multicultural, or multicultural politics. And I really wanted to get out of that, because I felt that I was back-peddalling in many ways and that I never could get to further stages of intellectual work.³⁸

Gunew’s work in multicultural literary studies, however, did establish a new cultural orthodoxy that continues to tweak and inform the interests of academics and writers today. The great misfortune was that the multicultural literary debates became so protracted, and the pro-multiculturalist position was so frequently undermined, that momentum could no longer be sustained. The pro-multiculturalist argument began to disappear from broader public discussion, as well as from the pages of literary journals,

jettisoned by the Howard Government's consistent reluctance to embrace and promote multiculturalism. As Wenche Ommundsen writes, "Under the Howard Government, departments and government officials have been encouraged to avoid the term whenever possible".³⁹ These efforts to encourage the 'disremembering' or silencing of multiculturalism have been effective. Dessaix's view, that only one cultural conversation is valid, won the fight.

Many writers and academics wrote in support of multicultural literary studies because they wanted to see an invigorated, diverse literary landscape that addressed and identified with larger portions of Australian readers. Such desires to reshape Australia's literary and cultural landscape are hardly new. But what has really changed since the publication of Mark Davis's *Gangland* in 1999, or even Donald Horne's *The Lucky Country* in 1964? After years of growing pluralism in certain areas of Australian society and culture, and with optimists believing that the white or Anglo face of Australia is no longer sustainable or tenable, there does remain an imbalance towards white or Anglo tradition in Australia's realms of power and influence, including in Australian publishing and literature. Gatekeepers not only continue to keep watch at the gates, they knock out anyone who goes near them.

1. *Australian Book Review* 128, February/March 1991, p.22–28. The cover carried the headline: "Robert Dessaix on the abuses of multiculturalism".
2. Robert Dessaix, 'Nice Work If You Can Get It', *Australian Book Review* 128, February/March 1991, p.23.
3. *ibid.*, p.24.
4. *ibid.*, pp.26, 28, italics his.
5. Janet Chimonyo, 'Challenging the Pieties', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 September 1993, p.10.
6. Jeff Sparrow, 'Conventional Puffery' (review of Robert Dessaix, ed., *Best Australian Essays 2004*), *Overland* 178, 2005, pp.74–75.
7. John Docker, 'The Temperament of Editors and a New Multicultural Orthodoxy', *Island* 48, 1991, p.53.
8. Interview with Sneja Gunew, 19 June 2003, Melbourne.
9. *ibid.*
10. Lolo Houbein, 'The Role of "Ethnic" Writers in Australian Literature', in Joost Daalder & Michele Fryar (eds), *Aspects of Australian Culture*, Abel Tasman Press, Adelaide, 1982, p.96.
11. Peter Lumb, 'Introduction', in Peter Lumb & Anne Hazell (eds), *Diversity and Diversion: An Annotated Bibliography of Australian Ethnic Minority Literature*, Hodja Educational Resources, Richmond, 1983, p.xiv.
12. James Jupp, 'Ethnic Books and Books on Ethnicity', *Australian Book Review* 122, July 1990, pp.4, 5.
13. The descriptive term 'ethnic bandwagon' is taken from Lolo Houbein, 'The Role of "Ethnic" Writers in Australian Literature'. This term was used by both protagonists and antagonists to describe the literary work of the era. It could be used to belittle or undermine the work of multiculturalists or as an apt

description of the prevailing atmosphere of the time.

14. Barry York, 'A Weird Mob', *National Library of Australia News* 10:3, December 1999, p.14.
15. *ibid.* More genuine examples of so-called 'ethnic' or 'multicultural' writing included works by Raffaello Carboni, Judah Waten and David Martin, though these works were not received in these terms.
16. A complete list is held by the author.
17. Al Grassby, 'Preface', *The First Multilingual Anthology in English and Other than English*, Dezsery Ethnic Publications, 1979.
18. *ibid.*
19. Janis Wilton & Richard Bosworth, *Old Worlds and New Australia*, Penguin, Ringwood, 1984, pp.136–37.
20. Houbein, 'The Role of "Ethnic" Writers', p.96.
21. 'Biographical Notes' of *Writing in Multicultural Australia 1984: An Overview*, Australia Council for the Literature Board, Sydney, 1985, p.165.
22. Rudi Krausmann, 'Andrew Dezsery', *MATIA: Literature*, Australia Council, North Sydney, 1989, pp.14–15.
23. *ibid.*
24. Jeltje Fanoy, 'Editorial', *Migrant* 7, 2, November 1983, p.2 (typos and presentation style have not been amended).
25. Kate Ahearne, 'Around the Journals: Getting words together', *Australian Book Review*, June 1985, p.37.
26. Serge Liberman, 'Letter to Dr Judith Brett', *Outsider* 1:2, December 1984, p.98
27. Docker, 'The Temperament of Editors', pp.50–55.
28. These are: *Ethnic Writings in English from Australia*, Department of English, University of Adelaide, South Australia, 1976; *Ethnic Writings in English from Australia: A Bibliography* (2nd revised and extended edition), Department of English, University of Adelaide, South Australia, 1978; and *Ethnic Writings in English from Australia: A Bibliography* (3rd revised and extended edition), Department of English, University of Adelaide, South Australia, 1984.
29. Wenche Ommundsen, 'Introduction', *Bastard Moon: Essays on Chinese-Australian Writing*, Special Edition of *Otherland* 7, July 2001. This absence was addressed in the 1990s, a period during which interest in Asian-Australian writing increased, by figures such as Rodney Noonan, whose 'Bibliography of Chinese Writing in Australia' is to appear in an edition of *Otherland*, edited by Ouyang Yu.
30. Sneja Gunew, *Beyond the Echo: Multicultural Women's Writing*, UQP, St Lucia, 1988, p.xiv.
31. Houbein, 'The Role of "Ethnic" Writers', p.96.
32. George Papaellinas, in an interview with *Ethnos* magazine, Ethnic Affairs Commission of New South Wales, 56, December 1986, p.3.
33. Sneja Gunew, 'Editorial: Beyond Multicultural Writing to Redefining Australian Literature', *Typereader: Journal of the Centre for Studies in Literary Education* 7, Autumn 1992, p.6.
34. *ibid.*
35. *ibid.*, p.7.
36. Mark Davis, 'Assaying the Essay: Fear and Loathing in the Literary Coteries', *Overland* 156, 1999, p.9.
37. *ibid.*
38. Mary Zournazi, 'Reinventing Selves: Sneja Gunew', in Mary Zournazi (ed.), *Foreign Dialogues: Memories, Translations, Conversations*, Pluto Press, Annandale, 1998, p.102.
39. Wenche Ommundsen, 'Not the M-Word Again: Rhetoric and silence in recent multiculturalism debates', *Overland* 159, 2000, p.5.

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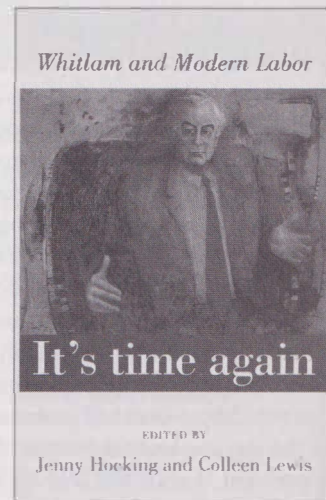
'IT'S TIME AGAIN'

Jenny Hocking and Colleen Lewis: *Whitlam and Modern Labor - It's Time Again* (Circa, \$34.95)

It's Time Again is a collection of essays about the Whitlam Government that attempts to analyse the relevance of that Government to contemporary Australian politics. 'Whitlamite' or 'Whitlamesque' have become pejorative terms, utilised by those on the Right of the ALP to promote an image of themselves as political 'hard heads' and to denigrate anybody who opposes them as ideological dreamers. 'Whitlamesque' was perhaps first used by Paul Keating. He used it to describe proposals to re-invigorate regional development policy during the period of his government. Don Watson has suggested that Keating perhaps regarded such proposals as too Keynesian or as smacking too much of the decentralisation policies popular under Whitlam.

Yet one of federal Labor's major contemporary political problems is the collapse of its vote in regional and rural Australia. Perhaps its position would be better if it had been less ideologically opposed to regional development policies during the Hawke-Keating period.

More recently, Bill Shorten, touted by the ALP Right as a potential future leader of the party, referred to the Left's "post-Whitlamite emphasis on progressive policies on the environment, refugees and multiculturalism" as factors that had become "a barrier to Labor reconnecting with its blue collar base and middle Australia". Yet another of Labor's major political problems is that it is often outflanked



on social issues. This is an area where Labor has struggled to find a consistent approach because of a willingness to place the ever shifting tides of perceived political expediency ahead of principle, such as for example in international human rights law. While it is easy to disparage progressive social policies as 'post-Whitlamite' the notion that Labor can win power federally by taking a lower profile on social issues seems a dubious and simplistic view.

The awful truth is that Howard's success has not resulted from him adopting a low profile or even a monolithically reactionary approach on social issues. Instead he engages in the culture wars like an urban guerilla, carefully choosing his moments of attack and retreat and playing to different constituencies at different times. One day he will appease populist Anglo-Celtic sentiment in the outer at the Sydney cricket ground by denouncing Sri Lanka's best spin bowler as a "chucker". The next day he will visit a Mosque in Sydney's West and talk about the need to tolerate difference or tell the US Congress (as he did in 2002) that "our culture continues to be immeasurably enriched by immigration from the four corners of the world".

Never an easy target, Howard's latest move is to commit himself to an allegedly 'more compassionate' form of 'mandatory detention'. In the week of my writing this review, we watched aghast as the same class of people who were once accused by the

Liberals of throwing children off boats or of possibly including terrorists among their number, were described by Amanda Vanstone to a room full of primary school children as being 'brave' for having sought refuge in Australia.

In such difficult political times the title *It's Time Again* might be overly optimistic. But this book, edited by Monash University academics Jenny Hocking and Colleen Lewis, has much to offer those who still hope that it might be possible for an ALP that is both socially and economically progressive in character, to win government in Australia.

There is a chapter in the book on almost every aspect of the Whitlam Government's achievements. There is a chapter by Gough himself on the relevance of his Government. He says that in a country where the top 20 per cent of households earn 40 per cent of the income and the bottom 20 per cent earn only 8 per cent, Labor will lose its way if it gives up on public equality as its "basic test and guide".

The chapters by former judge Elisabeth Evatt, by Jocelyne Scutt and Dr Angela Ward all discuss the human rights legacy of the Whitlam Government. Evatt emphasises the Government's achievements for women, including the reopening of the equal pay case, the ratification of ILO conventions against discrimination, removal of sales tax on the contraceptive pill and the establishment of a Royal Commission on human relationships. According to Evatt the recommendations of that Royal Commission have "since found their ways into most federal and state laws and would hardly be seen as radical these days". Equally important however was the manner in which the Commission formed a link between people and government to identify issues of concern, canvass opinion and find out the facts. Evatt considers the passing of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 as the Whitlam Government's most significant human rights achievement. She describes this Act as having "paved the way for the decision in the Mabo case in 1992". Angela Ward compares the development of Australia's human rights law to contemporary developments in European Union law and concludes that Australia has again fallen behind.

The human rights endeavours of the Whitlam Government were not limited to a legislative program. The extension of funding of public education, including the introduction of free tertiary education, the creation of Medibank and extension of legal-aid funding are just a few of the measures that

indicate that the Whitlam Government backed up its human rights legislative program with budgetary resources.

Graham Freudenberg, Whitlam's chief speech writer, presents a chapter on the 1969 and 1972 election campaigns. He emphasises the importance of the 1969 election as setting the stage for the 1972 victory. Although Labor lost in 1969 the 7 per cent swing it received remains the largest swing between successive elections in federal electoral history.

Elisabeth Reid, appointed by Whitlam as the first ever prime ministerial adviser on women's affairs, focuses on the achievements of the government for women. She emphasises the promotion of women through the bureaucracy that occurred during the period. Yet she also provides a stark reminder of the times. There was not a single woman ALP parliamentary representative in the 1972 parliament and there was no specific policy on women in the 1972 platform.

Carmen Lawrence follows up on the issue of women and refers to Whitlam's acknowledgement in 1973 that he was leading a male-dominated party in a male-dominated parliament in a male-dominated society. She also says that Whitlam understood that policies needed to be based on principle – that people need something to believe in – and that there is no hope for Labor in merely trying to sell 'better management'.

The book also contains a chapter on constitutional reform by George Williams, a chapter on education by Simon Marginson and on health by Gwen Gray. Race Mathews and Frank Bongiorno discuss some of the Fabian influences underpinning the Whitlam Government's approach to public policy.

Nathan Hollier, Marian Sawyer and Andrew Scott discuss the reinvention of the Labor Party. Hollier focuses on how the New Right has sought to mythologise the period of the Whitlam Government. It has claimed that Whitlam was responsible for the worst economic situation since the Depression and that, through the loans affair, he was at the point of committing Australia to a massive debt. The facts, Hollier demonstrates, do not bear out these claims.

Sawyer notes the adoption of US 'new class' theory by certain elements within the Labor Party. These elements tend to be hostile to so-called 'special interest groups' and any agenda that mentions the word 'rights'. Scott compares Whitlam as opposition

leader between 1967 and 1972 with the Labor opposition since 1996 and Whitlam's criticism of 'small target' politics. He claims that for so long as Labor is scared to either tax or spend it will be limited in its capacity to develop policies to tackle the inequality generated by untempered free-market forces.

Paul Strangio's chapter comparing the politics of Whitlam and Jim Cairns is perhaps the most fascinating in the book. He cites Julia Gillard, who has correctly pointed out that while those on the ALP Left now tend to view the Whitlam period through rose-coloured glasses, at the time the ALP Left identified more with Cairns. Strangio contrasts the two men's backgrounds and explains the psychological factors that contributed to their differing political stances.

Whitlam came from a relatively privileged middle-class family. His father enjoyed a successful career in the public service. Whitlam had little personal reason to distrust the economic status quo. His background gave him an abiding faith in parliament as a vehicle for progressive social change. Cairns on the other hand had an early life that was overshadowed by economic insecurity. He also had a somewhat overbearing mother who was at the same time physically distant. She never got closer to the young Jim than when shaking hands, apparently fearing she might pass on to him the syphilis she had contracted from Jim's father. All of this left Cairns with a deeper scepticism of capitalism. He believed the real decision-making power lay elsewhere and that government was almost peripheral to the economic system. He held a radical but essentially oppositional ethos and ultimately retreated into the alternative lifestyle movement and the politics of personal liberation.

Yet Strangio does not miss one of the great ironies in the relationship between Whitlam and Cairns, a relationship which Whitlam says was never malevolent at a personal level. Despite Cairns's failures as a politician, the events of 1975 eventually revealed that there was at least some truth in his prophecies about the limits of parliamentary power, perhaps providing him with some kind of sad and very pyrrhic vindication over Whitlam.

Peter Holding is a member of the ALP, a member of the Socialist Left executive, and a member of the ALP's national policy committee. These views are his own and have no ALP or SL endorsement.

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ism⁴; rather, it would be more helpful to see it as advocacy for the socialisation of markets, which, I attempt to show, is a different thing.⁵ Although not always made explicit, the intellectual antecedents of the argument are an eclectic group comprising Keynes, Kalecki, Marx, Galbraith, Schumpeter, and Smith. The central figure, however, is Karl Polanyi, whose seminal work of 1944, *The Great Transformation*, remains the single most impressive critique of a market society ever written.⁶

CONTEMPORARY CLAIMS MADE

The ideological framework in which debate takes place about the role of the market has radically altered over the past twenty-five years. What used to be a representative view of the Centre-Right, that governments had a responsibility to redistribute economic largesse, after market allocation was (more or less) allowed to run its course (labelled ‘market redistributionism’ above), is now representative of the Australian Labor Party, while the historically left stance of ensuring institutional commitment to full and secure employment, a just distribution of wages overseen by a judicial process, and a robust public sector capable of influencing private-sector activity, before deciding the rules and institutional context in which markets are permitted to operate, is now absent from political debate.⁷ The present political economic dominance of the Right is only being reinforced by the reverence displayed towards the market by the ‘third way’ and many on the ostensible left. In fact, the language used by many of these apologists in the past two decades – ‘economic rationalism’ (when it is not), a reform process (when often it was not), a ‘third way’ (when it is not) – is itself suggestive enough of an acquiescent stance. Indeed, the nominal parliamentary Left no longer even refers to capitalism as capitalism, but as a ‘market economy’, thereby surrendering an enormous amount of rhetorical, linguistic, and cultural ground.

In eschewing the categories of Left and Right, Mark Davis, occupying what he terms the “new centre”, believes there is much support for the view that “free-market capitalism is the best way to generate wealth and allocate resources, but [that it needs to be] properly regulated and controlled, and oriented to the broad population rather than simply the needs of business”.⁸ Davis is no apologist for *laissez faire*. He contends that we cannot be content with “tinkering at the edges of a business-centred, free-market

status quo”, advocating that a more hands-on approach is warranted. Nevertheless, he laments that a “mediated embrace of the free market” and “the active pursuit of social justice” is “represented by no major political party in Australia”.⁹

It is uncertain whether Davis would advocate a model closer to the one pursued by Paul Keating, who, between 1992 and 1996 at least, could be seen as an advocate of market-generated wealth that could then be distributed by government. For his own part, Keating has recently advanced the view that the parliamentary ALP has “abandoned the Hawke-Keating economic model because it did not believe in it”.¹⁰ (The claim will come as a surprise to many observers of the ALP, and can perhaps be seen as an attempt to usher the ALP further along a trajectory even less critical of the market.) We do not have the space here to examine properly the coherence of Keating’s vision; it might be best summarised as neo-liberal in some respects and market redistributionist in others. Alternatively, its softer aspects might be summed up by what Fred Argy has called “progressive liberalism”,¹¹ although, more generally, Argy would rightly see some difference between his own progressive liberalism and the more right-wing approach of a Keating.

In singling out a model like Argy’s, we could hardly be accused of setting up a right-wing caricature. A model that favours the dynamic effects of competition and markets, while wanting governments to intervene actively to promote more equality (especially when outlined with subtlety), is considerably to the left of where we are at present. Yet the objection that is nevertheless to be made to Argy’s stance is that, even if the battle lines were to be moved to the territory he outlines, it is a terrain far short of where a left movement worth its salt should be headed.

Lindy Edwards has analysed with precision and clarity both the particular advantage and the fundamental drawback of Argy’s position.¹² As Edwards points out, the stance of progressive economists such as Argy undermines progressive politics by limiting the field of the debate:

The coup was when progressive economists began to argue that markets deliver efficiency but not equity. [This development] ripped the debate in two. The natural outcome of the market was labelled ‘efficiency’ and an ideologically neutral social good

that could be pursued by [governments] of all colours.¹³

Once this position predominates, questions dealing with power imbalance, economic inequality, exploitation, and fairness – together with the supposed efficiency of the market in the first place – are marginalised.

The ALP's position on the market is outlined in its 2004 Platform, and is worth stating at some length:

Labor is committed to managing the economy in the interests of all Australians. This is why Labor supports a dynamic economy that balances private sector competition, strategic government interventions to address market failure, and the demands of corporate social responsibility. Labor believes in competition and improved productive performance which promotes greater market entry, increased real wages and delivers gains to Australian consumers. The Liberal and National Parties, by contrast, believe in business deals and preferment and have ignored the adverse socio-economic impacts on some Australians of their policies. The rigour of private sector competition, the supportive role of government, and the demands of corporate social responsibility are the keys to economic growth, improved productive performances and competitiveness.¹⁴

Notwithstanding the nuance, this position affords the central place to the market allocation process. Other arrangements – to address market failure, facilitate greater market entry and competition, and maintain a supportive role of government – are made around this centrality. By contrast, a classic left stance, broadly speaking, asserts that the fundamental political economy of markets cannot be escaped. In the final analysis, the political process has prerogative, and thus the task is to make this explicit.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF MARKETS

Polanyi's crucial insight was that all markets are socially constructed. Even in the most simple, tangible, and idealised of market depictions – say, a fish or fruit and vegetable market with many buyers and sellers in which no-one has an individual impact on market price, and in which entry or exit is costless – there have been legal and environmental arrangements, for example, that will pertain to the situation at hand.

In more complex and abstract, less idealised, and socially important scenarios, the degree of construction – historical, social, legal, industrial, political – is far greater, and perhaps more obvious. Water and land rights have been continually evolving; physical infrastructure such as road, rail, sea, and air transport will bring about change, while telecommunications will determine further the scope of markets; government establishes legal requirements, financial disclosure laws, and tax policy; social infrastructure such as education, housing, and health systems will shape enormously both markets and their outcomes.¹⁵ And all of this is true of the absence of intervention. A decision to do nothing is still a decision that shapes an outcome.¹⁶ Markets do not exist *a priori*; nor will markets operate 'naturally' once provided the 'right conditions'. Markets are brought about by private and public activity, and are continually reconstructed.¹⁷

It might be proffered that it is obvious that all markets are socially constructed, and asked what objection the Left can therefore have to them. This would be to miss the point of the argument. The objection is not to markets per se; the objection is to the market *system*, to what Polanyi called 'market society', 'disembedded markets', or – a particular form of a market system – to what was once termed 'capitalism'. The present analysis blows the whistle on the false choice being offered. The choice to be made is not between a market system and central planning.¹⁸ The choice is between a (self-regulating) market system – markets "unconstrained by society and operating simply by [their] own law of supply and demand" – and a situation in which the production, distribution, and exchange of goods and services are embedded in publicly explicit social relations.¹⁹ Acknowledging that the democratic determination of economic outcomes is the *sine qua non* of a socially embedded economy, the political issue awaiting determination is about what institutional changes are necessary to bring about a more democratic society (and economy). That debate will swing, in large part, on how effective the Left is in showing the extent of duplicity in so-called 'free market' views.

One free-market contention in particular is worth singling out. The liberal view of the most important market, the labour market, rests, as Fred Hirsch pointed out in a period, significantly, of the labour movement's comparative strength, "on the

implicit judgment that collective exploitation of the economic power of individuals, even if they are themselves relatively weak, can be ethically condemned while individual exploitation of the independently strong cannot be".²⁰

Further back, Adam Smith was one of the first to observe that the activity of employers, or 'masters', colluding to keep wages down, goes without reproach, while the pursuit of workers collectively attempting to gain higher wages is disparaged.

At the time of writing, the Howard Government has announced its proposals to change once more the framework of industrial relations. Part of its stated rationale for doing so rests on a claim that a greater level of flexibility in the labour market will modernise the Australian economy, ensuring greater competitiveness. For the sake of brevity, we leave aside the more obvious attack being waged on employees and their unions (though of course a focus on this attack would be part of a defence mounted by the labour

the main reason it has been consigned to the electoral margins. Its way of differentiating itself from the Coalition is to criticise the latter (seen above in the reference to 'business deals and preferment') for its lack of consistency and purity in obeying market allocation processes, implying that it (the ALP) believes in an ethically and politically neutral stance.

Once the duplicity is exposed, the intellectual argument would then move to an explicit, alternative contrivance of economic and social outcomes. The difference would be twofold: first, a genuine left approach would be built on the explicit understanding that all markets are socially constructed; and, hence, the only argument (or set of arguments) to be had will centre on which institutional framework is to operate. What outcomes are we trying to achieve? What kinds of markets do we want? How do we achieve these outcomes with the greatest possible levels of equality?

The present debate about the Australian labour

A decision to do nothing is still a decision that shapes an outcome. Markets do not exist *a priori*; nor will markets operate 'naturally' once provided the 'right conditions'. Markets are brought about by private and public activity, and are continually reconstructed.

movement). An intellectual counterattack should highlight the fact that the market for labour is not like any other market, if only because "people, unlike things, have a broad range of possible outputs".²¹ Another crucial aspect of the counter-attack would be to demonstrate the extent to which the Howard Government is attempting to engineer a particular political economic outcome. Individual contracts in the form of Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) are not popular,²² and so the Coalition's aim is to make them staple fare. This political economic engineering is to occur by the use of a financial and legal framework that favours the issuing of AWAs over collective bargaining,²³ in addition to the direct undermining of processes that pertain to collectively bargained enterprise agreements.

The duplicity of the Right, then, lies in its extolling (even deification) of the free market,²⁴ while simultaneously manipulating, often covertly, a particular kind of outcome. The incompetence of the Federal Parliamentary Labor Party in failing more generally to expose these kinds of deceit is arguably

market and industrial relations is again a good case in point. The ACTU has been disseminating a solid intellectual basis for change that would achieve the stated goals of productivity growth and responsiveness. The fundamental difference is that the ACTU's model addresses issues such as skills shortages, training, retraining, education, infrastructure, real income maintenance and support, job security, occupational health and safety, workplace morale, and so on. Addressing some or all of these in a positive fashion will result no less in a market outcome; quite simply, it will result in a different kind of market.

A very similar point can be made about competitiveness. Again, the Coalition's instinct is to attempt an increase in workforce competitiveness by attacking working conditions that have been collectively gained. Political success in this approach will depend on the extent to which the Coalition can distract enough people from the nakedness of its attack, and convince the electorate that its approach is the only alternative. Rather than argue for the status quo, the Left ought to argue, as the ACTU has been, that

there are 'low and high' roads to competition. Frank Stilwell has written about the choice to be made between "weak and strong" competition, which we might term alternatively 'negative' and 'positive' competition.²⁵ Competition can occur through wage cutting, or it can occur through innovation. Following Australia's own tradition of the minimum wage (together with Christian social thought – and Polanyi), the debate on the minimum wage calls for re-establishing the principle of the just wage.²⁶ Following Schumpeter, the debate calls for a wider analysis of the industrial structure and technical state of the economy.²⁷ The fundamental point is that there is no such thing as deregulating a labour market. Labour markets are re-regulated to achieve a different purpose from the prevailing situation.

SOME WILL JUDGE that, in saying all markets are socially constructed, a necessary and desirable disconnection has not been achieved between market and non-market activity. But we are referring here only to activity that can be viewed as part of the realm of commercial exchange. The debate about which areas of human life should not at all be subject to the market will (and should) continue.²⁸ Having collapsed all markets into the one category of socially constructed institutions, the conceptual distinction for the Left to make is between markets that are embedded in social and moral auspices and those that are not. Of those that are currently embedded, we need to examine more consciously than before the qualitative nature of such embeddedness. Those that are currently disembedded need to be examined against the kinds of political, social, and moral criteria the polity wishes to establish for their equitable and efficient operation.

Returning to this terrain gives the Left the intellectual and moral ammunition to fight the battle on democratic terms. Capitalism can define itself only within the parameters of free-, or self-regulating, market rationality,²⁹ even though, as we have seen, it constantly breaches its own logic and definition. For the Left to concede to a 'rationality' of this kind – or anything like it – is madness. Certainly, in its ad hoc and capricious behaviour, the Right has shown that it does not believe its own propaganda about not interfering in market outcomes. The task of the Left, now as always, is to expose the surreptitious nature of the Right's interventions, lay the foundations for interventions of a fundamentally different

kind and purpose, resurrect the political project, and reclaim civil society.

1. It needs to be noted that the first association of market philosophy was with constitutionalism, not democracy. Peter Self, *Rolling Back the Market: Economic Dogma and Political Choice*, Macmillan, London, 2000, p.1.
2. I make no apology for employing the binary terminology of 'right' and 'left'. As I hope to show, the ideological framework on which these terms are based is still relevant. When used as short-hand expression for deeper insight, the terms are still useful.
3. An early example of third-way thought is Anthony Giddens, *The Third Way: the Renewal of Social Democracy*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1998. For critical assessments of the third way that are in keeping with the approach of the present discussion, see Clive Hamilton, 'The Third Way and the End of Politics', *The Drawing Board: An Australian Review of Public Affairs*, 2 (2), 2001, pp. 89–102; Tim Battin, 'The Australian Labor Party and the Third Way', in Paul Boreham, Geoffrey Stokes and Richard Hall (eds), *The Politics of Australian Society: Political Issues for the New Century*, 2nd edn, Pearson Education, Sydney, 2004, pp.37–50.
4. See J. Le Grand and S. Estrin (eds), *Market Socialism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989.
5. See Diane Elson, 'Market Socialism or Socialisation of the Market?' *New Left Review*, 172, November/December, 1988, pp.3–44.
6. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (1944), Beacon Press, Boston, 1970.
7. The last Commonwealth government defending such a view, the Whitlam Government, is now widely (mis)represented as economically incompetent, at least in the mass media. See Nathan Hollier's critique of this misrepresentation, 'From Hope to Disillusion? The Legacy of the Whitlam Government in Australian Policy and Culture', in J. Hocking and C. Lewis (eds), *It's Time Again: Whitlam and Modern Labor*, Circa, Melbourne, 2003, pp.414–443, at pp.422–5.
8. Mark Davis, 'Australian Democracy Now: notes toward a position' in *The Ideas Book*, UQP, 2004, pp.120–129, at p.125.
9. *ibid.*
10. Peter Hartcher, 'Keating Blasts Labor', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 May 2005, p.1.
11. Fred Argy, *Where to From Here? Australian Egalitarianism Under Threat*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2003, p.97.
12. Lindy Edwards, book review, 'Fred Argy, Where to From Here?', *Journal of Economic and Social Policy* 8:2, 2004, pp.67–72.
13. *ibid.*, p.69. Edwards would not want to suggest that there are not other, more radical economists engaging in debate. Her concern is that Argy's stance is illustrative of the limits on how far one is permitted to travel before leaving the field of so-called respectable economics. For a more extended and general discussion of how economists think, see her *How to Argue with an Economist*, CUP, 2002.
14. The Platform of the Australian Labor Party (ch.2), adopted January 2004.
15. Arthur MacEwan, *Neo-liberalism or Democracy? Economic Strategy, Markets, and Alternatives for the 21st Century*, Pluto Press, Sydney, and Zed Books, New York, 1999, pp.109 & 119.
16. One method of the social construction of markets is by doing little or nothing about negative externalities, a form of hidden protection. For example, salinity now affects fifteen million hectares of Australia and costs some \$250 million per annum in lost production. See Christopher Sheil, 'In the Era of Perpetual War: Globalisation Revisited', Evatt Foundation, May 2005. <evatt.labor.net.au/publications/papers/142.html>. Accessed on 27 June 2005.

17. Arthur MacEwan, *Neo-liberalism or Democracy?*, p.118; see also, Colin Leys, *Market-Driven Politics: Neoliberal Democracy and the Public Interest*, Verso, London, 2001.
18. See support for this point of the argument in G.C. Harcourt, 'Markets, Madness and a Middle Way', in G.C. Harcourt, *Selected Essays on Economic Policy*, Palgrave, London, 2001, pp.232–46.
19. Geoffrey Baum, *Karl Polanyi on Ethics and Economics*, McGill-Queens University Press, Montreal and Kingston, 1996, p.5.
20. Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1976, p.156.
21. Robert Kuttner, *Everything for Sale: The Virtues and Limits of Markets*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1997, p.70.
22. Ian Watson, John Buchanan, Iain Campbell and Chris Briggs, *Fragmented Futures: New Challenges in Working Life*, Federation Press, Sydney, 2003, p.112.
23. In government departments and statutory bodies, the process is obvious enough. But, at the time of writing, the Coalition was also attempting this engineering by putting at risk the tenders of various churches (Australia's biggest non-government employer) in the delivery of services if such tenders did not provide for AWAs to the exclusion of other employment arrangements.
24. See Marion Maddox, *God Under Howard: The Rise of the Religious Right in Australian Politics*, Allen & Unwin, 2005, pp.195–319.
25. Frank Stilwell, *Changing Track: A New Political Economic Direction for Australia*, Pluto Press, Sydney, 2001, p.250.
26. The Harvester judgement established that the level of the minimum wage be determined according to need. The logic of this decision is that only firms that were efficient enough to pay decent wages would legally survive. Any firm that could not afford to pay such a wage had no business being in business – a kind of 'reverse economic rationalism'.
27. Geoff Dow lists a number of serious deficiencies of an Australian economy that is a legacy of neo-liberal construction – a chronic balance of payments problem, ballooning foreign debt, a shrinking export/GDP ratio, a declining proportion of manufacturing output (at the same time as two-thirds of growth in world trade can be attributed to manufacturing), an over-reliance on basic commodities, to name a few. Dow, 'Neoliberal Corporate Governance of the Australian Economy', in Stephen Bell (ed.), *Economic Governance and Institutional Dynamics*, OUP, Melbourne, 2002, pp.53–75, at 62–63.
28. See for instance, Adrian Walsh, 'Market Pathology and the Range of Commodity Exchange: A Preliminary Sketch', *Public Affairs Quarterly* 12:2, 1998, pp.203–19; see also Robert E Lane's fascinating study of economic psychology, *The Market Experience*, CUP, Cambridge, 1991.
29. Robert Pollin and Alexander Cockburn, 'The World, the Free Market and the Left: Capitalism and its Specters', *The Nation* 252:7, 25 February 1991.

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ASPEN TREE, your leaves look white into darkness.
My mother's hair never did turn white.

Dandelion, so green is the Ukraine.
My fair-haired mother came not home.

Rainclouds, do you dawdle at the spring?
My quiet mother wept for all.

Round star, you tie the golden bow.
My mother's heart was hurt by lead.

Oaken door, who heaved you from your hinges?
My tender mother cannot come.

PAUL CELAN, 1952

TRANS. MURRAY ALFREDSON

NB: This poem commemorates the murder of Celan's mother in a Nazi death-camp.

UNDERSTANDING AND CHANGING CAPITALISM

Nathan Hollier (ed.): *Ruling Australia: The Power, Privilege and Politics of the New Ruling Class* (Australian Scholarly Publishing, \$29.95)

Rick Kuhn (ed.): *Class and Struggle in Australia* (Pearson Longman, \$41.95)

As aspirational politicians and leaders encourage voters and consumers to engage in ever higher levels of spending, growing attention has turned to why some Australians are being 'left behind'. Even the Prime Minister lamented in 2003 that we're not as egalitarian as we used to be. Occasionally, his moments of nostalgia trump a sense of personal responsibility.

However, despite the wealth of contemporary analysis on poverty and inequality, there is little discussion of wealth itself – including the power and privileges it generates (Michael Gilding, in Hollier ed., p.112). Explanations for this oversight include the so-called 'decline of the left', the 'death of class' and the 'dearth of class analysis' (Diane Fieldes in Kuhn ed., p.57 and Hollier., p.xxxii). So confident is the commentator Frank Devine about the ascendancy of modern conservative thought that he likens attacking the Left to "shooting fish in a barrel" (*Australian*, 3 June 2005).

These recent collections are testimony to the ongoing relevance of the Left and its preparedness to tackle central problems facing Australia – principally capitalism. These collections shatter the illusion that the market has enhanced our lives and both provide a powerful refutation of 'class-denial'. "The working class is still there", as R.W. Connell proclaims in *Ruling Australia*, even though it has undergone a significant process of "recomposition" over the past thirty years (Fieldes in Kuhn, p.58). Furthermore, a decline in class consciousness doesn't *undermine* class analysis. The 'injuries' of class are found in

health, education, housing, incarceration, income and access to information (Verity Burgmann in Hollier, p.64 and Kuhn, p.2).

The form of class analysis adopted in both books transcends a hierarchical ordering of social groups. Statistical indicators can describe the world but cannot by themselves suggest a 'framework' (Kuhn, p.3). Or, as Hollier notes: "While description of wealth ownership and control can hope to give a clear picture of inequality, description alone cannot hope to explain the causes and effects of this or offer something better". Following Marx, both books emphasise the exploitative nature of capital accumulation and – to employ Connell's distinction – they go beyond a 'categorical' approach to class and engage in a 'generative' analysis that focuses on class's relational aspects (Demetris Demetriou in Hollier, ch.2).

While the books complement each other, Hollier's collection is more focused on how the ruling class rules. This question is addressed in the first four chapters of Kuhn, before it turns to the role of anti-hegemonic movements: students, gay and lesbian resistance, gender relations, Indigenous rights, migrant struggles, anti-colonialism and environmental movements. These movements are often portrayed by right-wing intellectuals as the step-children of Left intellectuals still suffering from the bereavement of the working class. Yet *Class and Struggle in Australia* explores the way these relations are shaped by the process of capital accumulation, strengthening class analysis rather than substituting for it.

If the Hollier collection focuses more on *understanding* contemporary capitalism and the changing nature of the ruling class under a more neo-liberal regime of accumulation, then Kuhn's text looks

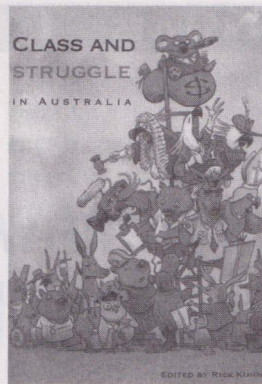
Both books provide a timely reminder that the ruling class *does* rule and both provide concrete illustrations.

more deeply at *changing* the system. This difference comes out most clearly in the approaches to class organisation and anti-systemic struggles. The Hollier collection remains vague on the issue of class mobilisation, captured in Mark Davis's call for the diverse counter-hegemonic forces "to come together around a compelling, popular reformist narrative, and for a new set of ideas to enter the vernacular and form the basis of a new, broad-based consensus". The Kuhn collection is clearer on strategy, characterised by Tom Bramble's call for the need to build a working-class party around a revolutionary program.

The Left cannot avoid this debate over strategy, no matter how often it has been replayed in the past. If class rule remains a reality, then the way the oppressed can mobilise must be addressed. This is an issue that many on the Left have wished away over the past thirty-odd years in the hope that new social movements will shine a light on the path to a better future. Yet it is not clear that this can be any more effective than the more traditional approach advocated by Kuhn.

Both books explore the relationship between culture and capital through employing the Gramscian concept of 'hegemony'. As Connell pointed out in *Ruling Class Ruling Culture* (the book which inspired the Hollier collection), anti-systemic mobilisation must confront the cultural strength of capital in addition to its economic and political power. This hegemony obscures the dynamics of class oppression. As Kuhn quips: "Capitalism is the first class system in history that pretends not to be one." The Left must always therefore "re-read capital" and these two collections are the most readable analyses of power to emerge from the Australian Left for a long while.

The distinction between class appearance and reality is implicit in the way both books treat glo-



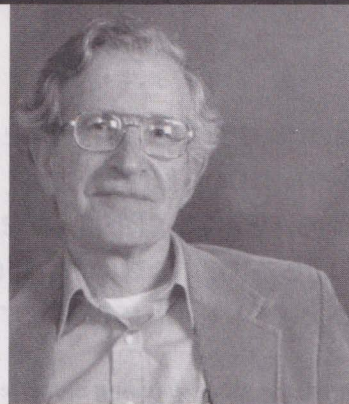
balisation. Since Connell wrote *Ruling Class Ruling Culture* in 1977, 'fortress Australia' has been assailed through deregulation, privatisation, corporatisation and globalisation. The more porous nature of economic and cultural boundaries altered irrevocably the terms under which capital accumulation takes place. Yet both books dispel any illusion that globalisation is a variable of change independent of capital accumulation. They reintroduce the geography of class into globalisation debates.

This provides a way of challenging the hegemonic discourse over globalisation (or the 'TINA principle': see Connell, p.17 and Burgmann, p.51 in Hollier), which lifts responsibility from local corporate leaders and politicians and which allows social democrats to deny any power to effect progressive reform. Both books provide a timely reminder that the ruling class *does* rule and both provide concrete illustrations of its operation, from corporate networking, through to influence on government, the role of right-wing think-tanks, media messages, manufactured consent and open threats to worker solidarity.

Hollier and Kuhn aid our understanding of the structure of contemporary power relations while inspiring a search for a constructive outlet for anger (Connell, p.22 in Hollier). As Demetriou (in Hollier, p.37) points out, it has always been one of Connell's strengths to recognise that "structure is not only a system of 'intractabilities' but also a system of possibilities". These publications deserve to be placed alongside Connell's work, belonging as they do to the best tradition of the Australian Left, bringing back a much needed focus on the way class acts.

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THE WILD MAN IN THE WINGS: NOAM CHOMSKY



IN JANUARY 1967, with the war against Vietnam well underway, one of the architects of US strategy was analysing its progress. A satisfied McGeorge Bundy, National Security Adviser to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, pointed to the narrow limits of the debate. He acknowledged that “[t]here are wild men in the wings, but on the main stage . . . the argument on Viet Nam turns on tactics, not fundamentals”.¹ Bundy approved of debates on tactical questions of how to fight the war. But only ‘wild men’ would question the right of the US to intervene.

A month later, the *New York Review of Books* published an essay that did just that. Titled ‘The Responsibility of Intellectuals’,² its author was Noam Chomsky, Professor of Linguistics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Rather than argue that the war was a mistake, or too costly, or required different tactics, Chomsky challenged the right – not the ability – of the US to invade. His analysis targeted the bureaucrats, academics and media commentators who were genuflecting before power. Soon after, the ‘wild man in the wings’ participated in landmark protests at the Pentagon and shared a jail cell with the author Norman Mailer. Mailer would later describe Chomsky as “a slim sharp-featured man with an ascetic expression, and an air of gentle but absolute moral integrity”. He was eager to discuss linguistics with Chomsky, who was “considered a genius at MIT”. The problem was that while Mailer had “several wild theories in his pocket”, he “had never been able to exercise” them “since he could not understand what he read in linguistics books”.³ Mailer was not alone in his incomprehension. Closer to home, Keith Windschuttle showed in a recent article that he couldn’t tell linguistics from linguini.⁴

This essay will shed some light on the matter and also outline aspects of Chomsky’s political work.

Avram Noam Chomsky was born in Philadelphia in 1928 to immigrant parents who were devoted to a Hebrew-nationalist culture based on the Hebrew language. He appears to have benefited from this observant if not deeply Orthodox household which nonetheless had a highly unconventional attitude to child-rearing. His mother was a widely respected teacher and his father was a renowned Hebrew scholar who once described the major objective of his life as “the education of individuals who are well integrated, free and independent in their thinking, concerned about improving and enhancing the world, and eager to participate in making life more meaningful and worthwhile for all”.⁵ This is pretty much how Noam, as Avram is commonly known, has turned out. His own son lovingly recalled:

You would read to me at bedtime – from books about relativity theory. You would draw me funny pictures of giraffes – which contained linear equations that you would then teach me how to solve. You pointed me to sources of information for Social Studies reports, without my ever realising quite how different these sources were from what most students were using. You taught me how to sail, and then spent a sailboat outing arguing with me over whether there can be any intellectual justification for spiritual beliefs.⁶

The 13-year-old Chomsky would take the train from Philadelphia to New York by himself, browsing in bookshops along Fourth Avenue. In New York, he came under the influence of his aunt’s husband, Milton Kraus, who ran a newsstand that served as a

venue for intense late-night political discussions. As Chomsky puts it, “[t]he great moments of my life in those years were when I could work at the newsstand at night and listen to all this”.⁷ He came to favour a non-Bolshevik socialism which argued that there were incipient socialist institutions developing in Russia before the Bolshevik coup in October 1917. These institutions were dismantled by the Bolsheviks, who blocked the free development of labour, shut down the workers’ councils and crippled the unions. Under the compelling pressures of ‘war communism’, they tried to replicate capitalist methods in order to survive.⁸

Even before his teens, Chomsky read the proofs of his father’s book about thirteenth-century Hebrew grammar and immersed himself in nineteenth and twentieth-century Hebrew literature. His study of Hebrew culture converged with his political concerns, resulting in a keen interest in Zionism. He became a Zionist youth leader in the cultural Zionist movement, doing “more reading in that area than any other” until he was 16.⁹ The cultural Zionist view was devoted to a Jewish cultural home in Palestine and to Arab-Jewish cooperation within a socialist framework. It opposed “the deeply anti-democratic concept of a Jewish state”,¹⁰ which would inevitably discriminate against non-Jews. In his late teens, Noam helped his mother write and direct a play, *Hevele Mashiach*, about Jewish refugees yearning to go to Palestine.¹¹ It showed the horror of the Holocaust being followed by the formation of Israel. He continued to argue against the partition of Palestine, dismissing “the possibility of flourishing and developing . . . in a partitioned land”.¹² He “felt sure that the socialist institutions of the Yishuv – the pre-state Jewish settlement in Palestine – would not survive the state system”.¹³

At this time, Israel “had remarkably slight effects on the inner life of American Jewry”,¹⁴ and only two prominent American Jewish intellectuals openly identified with it: Noam Chomsky and Hannah Arendt. When Israel was ordered out of the Sinai in 1956, American Jewish leaders ultimately “preferred to counsel Israel to heed [Eisenhower] rather than oppose” his wishes.¹⁵ By contrast, Chomsky had championed Israel and even intended to emigrate there. He “reacted with virtually uncritical support for Israel” during the June 1967 war.¹⁶ However, during the 1960s the US had begun to see Israel as a barrier to nationalist pressure and a guardian of

the corrupt family dictatorships which controlled Middle Eastern oil. The 1967 war confirmed Israel’s value as a strategic asset: at a time when the US was meeting stiff resistance in Vietnam, Israel showed that it could crush resistance in its region. US aid therefore quadrupled in 1970 and has stayed high ever since.

From this point on, some American Jews began to identify openly with Israel, because to do so would allow them into the precincts of power in the US, where they could advance the interests of American elites.¹⁷ Chomsky has suggested that these ‘supporters of Israel’ should more properly be called “supporters of the moral degeneration and ultimate destruction of Israel”,¹⁸ which is now the most militarised society in the world, heavily dependent for its survival on the United States and therefore a reliable asset.¹⁹

Often described as a ‘self-hating Jew’, Chomsky’s concerns in fact place him at the very core of the Jewish tradition. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel’s study of the biblical prophets demonstrated that the prophets were not fortune-tellers who predicted the future. Rather, they were concerned “about widows and orphans, about the corruption of judges and affairs of the market place”.²⁰ Their moral sense was aroused not by “the spiritual realities of the Beyond, but the life of the people; not the glories of eternity, but the blights of society”.²¹ Unsurprisingly, they were hated by those who were committed to an unjust status quo. In the first book of Kings, for instance, the militaristic King Ahab and his elite supporters despised the prophet Elijah, describing him as “*ocher yisrael*” or “hater of Israel”. Chomsky is attacked in almost identical terms. It is no accident that he was the only scientist or philosopher on the Nixon White House enemies list, and that the Soviet Union also imposed a total ban on his works (including in linguistics!). But future generations are likely to view this ‘wild man in the wings’ very differently – as they will his detractors.

LINGUISTICS TO COGNITIVE SCIENCE

In the 1940s Chomsky’s parents had introduced him to Zellig Harris, a linguist with radical political views at the University of Pennsylvania. Chomsky so enjoyed Harris’s politics that he began to get involved with his linguistics as well. At the time, linguistics had produced “recommendations about socially acceptable forms of speech, guidelines for learning

hitherto unknown languages, and . . . data [about] phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics".²² Chomsky studied linguistics and also obtained a thorough grounding in mathematics, logic and philosophy. He spent much productive time with philosophers like Willard Quine, John Austin and Nelson Goodman. This unusual combination would be a significant factor in his subsequent intellectual breakthrough. As Alfred North Whitehead once observed, "novel ideas are more apt to spring from an unusual assortment of knowledge – not necessarily from vast knowledge, but from a thorough conception of the methods and ideas of distinct lines of thought".²³

Chomsky spent four years trying to carry out a behaviourist program. He wanted to construct a number of inductive principles that would explain how language was acquired. Like other structural linguists at the time, he was looking for 'discovery procedures' in order to describe the grammar and phonology of language. In 1953, he published a technical paper on these discovery procedures and believed that this was the real stuff of linguistics. At the same time, he explored alternative ideas by trying to write a generative grammar as a private hobby. It was purely accidental that he took this up; from his father's work on medieval Hebrew grammatical texts, he knew that a historical linguist looks for sequences of change, one leading to another, over the centuries. Was there any correlation to psychological processes?

Using his knowledge of mathematics and logic, Chomsky began to construct models for such sequences to represent the psychological reality of language use. He had been fascinated by 'generative systems' – the procedures by which a mathematician, starting with postulates and utilising principles and references, can generate an infinite number of proofs. The eighteenth-century philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt may have had a similar concept, referring to language as a rule-governed system, rather than just a collection of words and phrases that corresponded to meanings. Humboldt regarded language as a system which "makes infinite use of finite means", meaning that an infinite number of sentences can be created using a finite number of words. But Humboldt didn't possess the mathematical techniques to turn these insights into an explanatory theory. These techniques, especially the notion of recursive systems of rules, would not be

available until two centuries later. Chomsky, by contrast, had received a thorough grounding in modern mathematics and so was able to use its techniques in what was at that stage still his private hobby.

On a trans-Atlantic voyage that year, a seasick Chomsky realised that the attempt to build up analytic procedures was nonsense; generative grammar was the real thing and "seemed to be consistently yielding interesting results".²⁴ He therefore gave up structural linguistics altogether in order to focus on his hobby, inventing the field of mathematical linguistics in the process. He soon demonstrated that language has all the formal precision of mathematics.

Chomsky's famous sentence 'Colourless green ideas sleep furiously' illustrated his argument that sentence structure could be studied independently of meaning. This sentence is meaningless but not gibberish; it is obviously a well-formed English sentence (as opposed to, say, 'Ideas colourless furiously green sleep'). The new linguistic science jettisoned meaning, focusing on the pure laws of syntax. Even the simplest sentences, it was then postulated, have an inner 'abstract' syntactic form. The linguistics research program then became redefined: how is the inner 'abstract' form mapped onto the outer forms accessible to our auditory and vocal sense organs? The idea "that an unconscious level of representation could be mapped at a conscious level" was enormously exciting, turning linguistics on its head.²⁵

Previously, linguistics involved listing, documenting and classifying as many languages as possible. With Chomsky's breakthrough, the new science of cognitive linguistics became the study of the language faculty of the human mind. No longer concerned with listing and classifying, the new goal was "to establish the psychological basis for Chomsky's postulates of innate language structure and transformational grammar".²⁶ This was accompanied by developments in related disciplines such as neuro-linguistics, which looks for the neurological mechanisms underlying different components of linguistics theory. Advances in technology, particularly in brain imaging techniques, have empowered this field.

In this discussion of the relationship between abstract properties and known physical mechanisms, it is worth recalling a previous example from the history of science to help clarify what is at stake.²⁷ In the nineteenth century, chemistry developed abstract representations of complex molecules long before the physicists were able to show, in the early part

of the twentieth century, that such things existed. It was much later that physicists began to discover the physical entities that had the properties corresponding to the chemists' abstract computational ideas. These computational ideas told physicists what to look for. They could not have developed the structure of the atom and the molecule if nineteenth century chemistry hadn't provided the abstract theories. Those theories of the chemist are similar to a linguist's theory of computations of the brain. Cognitive linguistics is to the future brain sciences what nineteenth-century chemistry was to quantum physics. Without information about the linguistic representations and computations, brain scientists of the future will not know what to look for. They will have to rely on the linguist to point to the abstract structures on which to base their physical explorations. Linguistics, therefore, is a theoretical psychology. It is far more profound than much of what today passes for psychology, which is preoccupied with collecting and recording data. Chomsky amusingly points out that psychology is probably the only serious candidate for a science in which there is no job description for "theoretical psychologist". Tenure in this field is obtained by recording data and publishing experimental papers.²⁸

CHILD OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the legacy of the Enlightenment has become – more than ever before – a contested terrain. Human rights are often used as an ideological excuse for the exercise of arbitrary power. Reactionaries have called for the defence of 'Western values' in an attempt to legitimise the subjugation of Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and North Korea. Given their reliance on the Enlightenment, it is noteworthy that Chomsky, perhaps their most prominent opponent, also declares "I am a child of the Enlightenment".²⁹

The Enlightenment gave rise to the classic liberal tradition, whose emphasis on freedom derives from the particular historical moment in which it arose. It was a product of an age when the primary threat to freedom emanated from state power, and severe inequalities in economic – or private – power were not yet a feature of society. Now that such inequalities are present, Chomsky merely extends the liberal tradition's defence of the individual to the contemporary situation. He argues for an Enlightenment-inspired version of libertarian socialism, with

its commitment to both equality and liberty.

In the absence of material equality, liberty remains an unfulfilled promise because of the compulsion that occurs between unequal actors. Coercion results under conditions of severe economic inequality because politically free people will be forced to 'choose' to rent themselves to an employer rather than make the alternative 'choice' of suffering starvation or poverty. Chomsky cites Simon Linguet, who pointed to the evils of the wage system as far back as the eighteenth century:

It is the impossibility of living by any other means that compels our farm labourers to till the soil whose fruits they will not eat, and our masons to construct buildings in which they will not live. It is want that drags them to those markets where they await masters who will do them the kindness of buying them. *It is want that compels them to go down on their knees to the rich man in order to get from him permission to enrich him.*³⁰

A lack of liberty, however, necessarily involves compulsion in determining the terms and conditions of material equality. Meaningful equality must include equality in decision-making processes as part of the realisation of liberty. The two terms are logically interdependent.³¹ Chomsky points out that the Enlightenment resulted in ideas that "people had natural rights, that they were fundamentally equal, that it was an infringement of essential human rights if systems of authority subordinated some to others, the insistence that there were real bonds of unity and solidarity among people across cultures".³² Although these ideas were "broken on the rocks of industrial capitalism",³³ their promise endures. This historically informed understanding of the Radical Enlightenment is anathema to power-worshipping reactionaries, who are also infuriated that – due to his calm but uncompromising stance after September 11 – Chomsky's writings and speeches are being accessed in record numbers by people who are new to politics. Naturally, the growing public interest in Chomsky's analysis is a serious cause for concern among reactionaries.

INTELLECTUAL SERVILITY

Chomsky's outspoken advocacy of the Radical Enlightenment is matched by a deep personal commitment. The journalist and aid worker Fred Branfman happened to be in Laos in 1970 when

the US subjected Laos's peasants to one of the most intense bombings in history. Branfman tried to raise international awareness of the bombings, taking dozens of people to camps where refugees could be interviewed. Chomsky, he says, was "the only one, besides myself, to cry". It should be noted that Chomsky's is not a scattergun approach. He does not appear to see himself as some kind of 'public intellectual' or 'commentator on world affairs'. Rather, he takes the view that, as an American, he bears special moral responsibility for the actions of the United States. His energies therefore focus particularly on the regions where US policy is at its most oppressive. When Indonesia invaded East Timor with US support in 1975, Chomsky joined other activists in a tireless campaign of international solidarity. His speeches and publications on this topic were prodigious and widely read, but his financial support is less well known. When the US media were refusing to interview Timorese refugees, claiming that they had no access to them, Chomsky personally paid for the airfares of several refugees, bringing them from Lisbon to the US, where he tried to get them into the editorial offices of the *New York Times* and other outlets. Most of his financial commitment to such causes has – because of his own reticence – gone unnoticed. A Timorese activist says, "we learnt that the Chomsky factor and East Timor were a deadly combination" and "proved to be too powerful for those who tried to defeat us".³⁴

By contrast, some intellectuals became willing dupes of the Indonesian propaganda apparatus: in 1983, P.P. McGuinness, then editor of the *Australian Financial Review* and today editor of *Quadrant* magazine, visited East Timor under Indonesian military escort. On his return to Australia, he claimed that he had observed no food shortages and seen no military repression. But this visit had a Potemkin quality – McGuinness, by his own admission, spoke none of the local languages and had everything translated for him by his military tour guides.³⁵

The case of East Timor provides an important insight into Chomsky's moral calculus: atrocities are abhorrent regardless of who commits them, but we have a special obligation to terminate those atrocities for which we bear responsibility. From 1975 to 1979, there was mass murder of comparable proportions in East Timor and in Cambodia. The US, the UK and Australia aided Indonesia's genocide in East Timor, where up to a third of the population died.

This was the worst slaughter relative to population since the Holocaust. It could have been terminated by withdrawing Western support to the Indonesian military. Instead, many self-described 'public intellectuals' in Australia and the US said little about it, preferring instead to denounce Pol Pot in Cambodia, where they had no prospect of terminating the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge.

A case in point is Robert Manne's recent book *Left Right Left*³⁶ where Cambodia – not the genocide in East Timor – is examined in detail. Mr Manne is a former editor of *Quadrant*, and his stewardship of that journal between 1989 and 1997 provides a revealing look at this kind of cost-free sermonising. After Indonesian troops murdered over 271 unarmed East Timorese civilians in Dili on 12 November 1991, Manne's editorial discussed Sigmund Freud's 'doctrine of negation':

A patient who embarked upon analysis by proclaiming love for his mother alerted his doctor at once to the source of his psychic difficulty. It is in a similar spirit that one of the most cherished pieties of contemporary Australian discourse – 'Australia is a part of Asia' – must be read.

Manne noted that "it is simply not possible to condemn slaughters in Beijing and condone them in Dili", but his overwhelming concern was Australia's relationship with Indonesia and Malaysia, in particular the "tensions between newly confident post-colonial societies and a newly despondent Western power which has only half-abandoned its own manner of moral superiority".³⁷ Reading through every issue of *Quadrant* during the eight years of his term as editor, the paucity of East Timorese voices is remarkable;³⁸ instead, space was extended to "a Perth lawyer and poet", Hal Colebatch, who had spent a few days in East Timor nearly twenty years before. *Quadrant's* readers were assured that, "those attempting to sabotage Australian-Indonesian relations over Timor are doing the Timorese people no service". After all, during his stay in 1973, he had "heard, second-hand from Australians in Baucau who had travelled across the island, that things were a good deal better in Indonesian West Timor . . . To think of an independent East Timor mounting its own defence force, health service, police, social security and diplomatic representation without years of preparation was a fantasy".³⁹ Another *Quadrant* writer, Peter Ryan, complained about "these left-

wing lunatics” in the “Timor clique” who “resemble the English prigs of the left in the 1930s”.⁴⁰

Mr Manne’s journal also carried a long article defending Indonesia’s actions:

Indonesia has not merely been a repressive force. It has heeded the advice of its critics and spent heavily on improving public facilities and education in East Timor. It spends much more per head in this province than any other, and infinitely more than the Portuguese did.⁴¹

As for the state of the bilateral relationship, the writer blamed the Australian media, saying that “perhaps the press should be more careful about what it publishes”. Also, “we should impose some limits on Asian refugees in their campaigning against the governments they have fled”. Finally, “[w]e already know a style appropriate for an Australian foreign policy – live and let live; don’t give needless trouble to the neighbours, especially big ones; bend with the seasons; be tough in defending our own farm and cunning in seizing what chances come our way”.

Mr Manne railed against crimes that he had no ability to stop, while largely ignoring a privileged opportunity to struggle against crimes in which his government was complicit. This is morally comparable to a Soviet commissar denouncing racism in the USA while saying little about the USSR’s support for tyranny in Eastern Europe. Perhaps the comparison is unfair . . . to the commissar, who had reason to fear for his physical wellbeing in a way that a Western intellectual did not. This is why Chomsky says that “the intellectual tradition is one of servility to power and if I didn’t betray it I’d be ashamed of myself”.⁴²

That Chomsky lives his politics is demonstrated in full measure by his defence of free speech in an area requiring perhaps the greatest degree of personal courage and commitment. I am referring, of course, to the Faurisson affair: Professor Robert Faurisson had been prevented from teaching French Literature at the University of Lyons in the late 1970s on the ground that he could not be protected from attacks against him as a result of his views about the Holocaust. He was brought before the French courts for denying the existence of gas chambers. Approximately five hundred people, among them Noam Chomsky, signed a petition defending Faurisson’s civil liberties. Sensing an opportunity to settle old scores, the press immediately called it ‘Chomsky’s

petition’ and accused him of supporting Faurisson’s views. Missing from this hysteria was the obvious principle that support for a person’s right to express certain views is independent of the views actually expressed. Thus, one might defend Salman Rushdie’s freedom to write the *Satanic Verses* without agreeing with the content of that book – or even needing to read it. Chomsky wrote a brief article clarifying this distinction. Without Chomsky’s knowledge, this article was used as the preface to a book on the case by Faurisson. Chomsky, who did not know of the existence of the book, was always concerned with the narrow issue of the injustice of preventing Faurisson from teaching French literature and of allowing the state to define historical truth and punish deviationism. Needless to say, however, Chomsky was labelled a ‘Holocaust-denier’ by his enemies, especially since his free speech convictions meant that he was unlikely to sue for defamation.

SUGGESTIONS FOR ACTIVISM

Chomsky’s view is “that the burden of proof has to be placed on authority, and that it should be dismantled if that burden cannot be met”. As for practical advice on what to do, the temptation to quote Chomsky’s own words is irresistible:

I think it only makes sense to seek out and identify structures of authority, hierarchy, and domination in every aspect of life, and to challenge them; unless a justification for them can be given, they are illegitimate, and should be dismantled, to increase the scope of human freedom. That includes political power, ownership and management, relations among men and women, parents and children, our control over the fate of future generations (the basic moral imperative behind the environmental movement, in my view), and much else. Naturally this means a challenge to the huge institutions of coercion and control: the state, the unaccountable private tyrannies that control most of the domestic and international economy, and so on . . .

There’s a tremendous diversity and range of interests and concerns now, and an awful lot of people are involved. And that gives us a kind of strength: an organised, centralised movement can easily be crushed; a very diverse movement that’s rooted all over the society – well, you can get rid of this piece and that piece and the other piece, but it’ll just come back up somewhere else . . . The fact that there’s

a tremendous diversity can be a real advantage – it can be a real way of learning . . . But, of course, if it's going to bring about real change, that broad array of concerns is going to require some form of integration and inter-communication and collaboration among its various sub-parts . . .

Now, we're not going to develop that sort of integration through the mainstream institutions . . . because they've got their own commitments, which are basically to private power. In the case of the media, they have a commitment to indoctrination in the interests of power, and that imposes pretty strict limits on what they can do. So the answer is, we've got to create alternatives, and the alternatives have got to integrate these lots and lots of different interests and concerns into a . . . series of interconnected [movements]: lots of associations of people with similar concerns, who've got in mind the other people next door who have related concerns, and who can get together with them to work for changes.⁴⁴

As for the prospects of success:

Whether people will react or not, who knows? You know? Everyone's got to decide.

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3. N. Mailer, *The Armies of the Night*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1968, pp.191–192.
4. K. Windschuttle, 'A Disgraceful Career', *The New Criterion*, 23:1, 2004. I am grateful to Dr Peter Slezak for this witticism.
5. C.P. Otero, 'Chomsky and the Libertarian Tradition: A Renewed Egalitarian Vision, a Coherent Social Theory and Incisive, Up-to-Date Analysis', vol.3, p.5 of C.P. Otero (ed.), *Noam Chomsky: Critical Assessments*, 4 vols, Routledge, London, 1994. Otero remarks that "[i]t is hard to improve on this as a description of Noam Chomsky as an individual".
6. H. Chomsky, '70th Birthday wishes', <www.zmag.org>, 1998.
7. J. Peck (ed.), *The Chomsky Reader*, Serpents Tail, London, 1987, p.11.
8. M. Brinton, *The Bolsheviks and Workers' Control, 1917 to 1921: the State and Counter-Revolution*, Solidarity, London. Also see A. Pannekoek, *Lenin as Philosopher: A critical examination of the philosophical basis of Leninism*, Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, 1938 (2003).
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17. *The Holocaust Industry*, pp.17–21, 24.
18. N. Chomsky, *The Fateful Triangle: The United States, Israel and the Palestinians*, South End Press, Boston, 1999, p.4.
19. See N. Chomsky, *Advocacy and Realism*, <www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?SectionID=22&ItemID=6110>, 26 August 2004, for current proposals.
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21. *The Prophets*, vol.2, p.144.
22. Z. Szabó, *Noam Chomsky*, in E. LePoré (ed.), *Dictionary of Modern American Philosophers, 1860–1960*, Thoemmes Press, Bristol, 2004.
23. A.N. Whitehead, *An Introduction to Mathematics*, Oxford University Press, London, 1948, p.101, in C.P. Otero (ed.), *Noam Chomsky: Language and Politics*, AK Press, Oakland, 2004, p.46.
24. F. Newmeyer 1986, *Linguistic Theory in America*, Academic Press, Orlando, p.30.
25. T. Bever & M. Montalbetti 2002, 'Noam's Ark', *Science*, vol.298, pp.1565–1566.
26. *ibid.*, p.1566.
27. N. Chomsky, *Language and Problems of Knowledge*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1987, pp.185–186.
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31. For a detailed analysis, see A. Edgely, *The Social and Political Thought of Noam Chomsky*, Routledge, London, 2002.
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33. N. Chomsky, *Powers and Prospects*, South End Press, Boston, 1996, ch.4.
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36. R. Manne, *Left Right Left*, Black Inc., Melbourne, 2005.
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40. P. Ryan, 'Indonesia and Me', *Quadrant*, July–August 1995, p.120.
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BUCKING THE SYSTEM

ANDREW WILKIE AND THE DIFFICULT TASK OF THE WHISTLEBLOWER

WHISTLEBLOWERS ARE PART of society's alarm and self-repair system, bringing attention to problems before they become far more damaging.¹ Australian whistleblowers have spoken out about police corruption, paedophilia in the churches, corporate mismanagement, biased appointment procedures, environmentally harmful practices and a host of other issues.

Although whistleblowers are extremely valuable to society, most of them suffer enormously for their efforts. Ostracism, harassment, slander, reprimands, referral to psychiatrists, demotion, dismissal and blacklisting are among the common methods used to attack whistleblowers. Bosses are the usual attackers with co-workers sometimes joining in.

Many whistleblowers are conscientious, high-performing employees who believe that the system works. That's why they speak out. They believe that by alerting others to a problem, it will be dealt with. Many do not think of themselves as whistleblowers at all – they believe they are just doing their job. So they are shaken to the core when the response to their public-spirited efforts is to vilify them as disloyal, to question their work performance, to withdraw emotional support and to mount attacks. As well as suffering financial losses and severe stress, whistleblowers are at increased risk of relationship breakdown and health problems.

Even worse than this, though, few whistleblowers seem to bring about any change in the problem they speak out about. The treatment of whistleblowers is a double disaster for society: capable and courageous individuals are attacked and sometimes destroyed, while the original problems are left to fester.

Bill Toomer was Western Australia's senior quarantine inspector in 1973 when he requested

fumigation of a ship in Fremantle because of the presence of mice and rats. Fumigation is costly and time-consuming and hence disliked by shipowners. Previously, in Victoria, Toomer had refused bribes to ignore infestations of ships. In the Fremantle case, Toomer was overruled by his superior and before long was fined, demoted and transferred. In 1980, due to the pressure, he retired at age 45. In the past three decades, his case has been brought before numerous politicians and agencies, including the Ombudsman, the Administrative Appeals Tribunal and the Merit Protection and Review Agency, with a number of them holding formal inquiries. Even today, Toomer's supporters continue to petition the government for compensation and have gathered evidence that Toomer was set up in Fremantle for removal from ship quarantine duties.²

For one man to lose his career is bad enough. For millions of dollars to be spent on inquiries is an added burden. But in some ways worst of all is that focusing on the treatment of Toomer distracted attention from the original issue of corruption in quarantine inspections.

Mick Skrijel was a crayfisherman in South Australia in 1978 when he reported to police and politicians what he thought were drug drops off the coast. Afterwards, his catches were stolen, his boat was destroyed by fire, his house was partially burnt and he was bashed. Moving to Victoria in the 1980s, his allegations were passed to the newly created National Crime Authority. Skrijel leafleted and picketed NCA headquarters over its inaction – and then the NCA investigated Skrijel himself, who went to prison for five months after a raid found explosives and marijuana on his property. His conviction was later quashed by the Victorian Supreme Court: the

judges found the explosives and marijuana could have been planted. Investigating the matter at the request of the government, QC David Quick recommended an inquiry, with royal commission powers, into the possibility that Skrijel was framed, but the government declined.³

Vast efforts have been made by Skrijel and his supporters to pursue justice over his case. Somewhere along the line, the original issue of the South Australian drug trade dropped off the main agenda.

These are but sketches of cases that are incredibly complicated, as are most whistleblower stories. But after hearing hundreds of such stories, there is a burning question that is easy to articulate: How can whistleblowers do better?

DISSIPATING OUTRAGE

To develop better tactics for whistleblowers, it is useful to examine injustices that cause outrage. Consider, for example, the Dili massacre.⁴ On 12 November 1991, thousands of East Timorese joined a funeral procession in Dili, using the occasion to protest against the Indonesian occupation of the country. As the crowd entered Santa Cruz cemetery, Indonesian troops that had surrounded the marchers opened fire without warning.

Unlike earlier massacres, this atrocity was witnessed by Western journalists and captured on videotape by filmmaker Max Stahl. Their reports led to international outrage against the Indonesian occupiers and a massive boost for the international support movement for East Timorese independence. The brutal assault on the funeral procession, intended to intimidate and subdue the independence movement, instead had the opposite effect of greatly increasing support for it. In short, the attack backfired on the Indonesian government.

In attacks like this, there are five methods commonly used by attackers to inhibit outrage. The first is cover-up. In previous massacres in East Timor, censorship had prevented information getting out in a timely and authoritative fashion. After the Dili massacre, the Indonesians cut off phone services out of East Timor. They also alerted Australian customs to search Max Stahl, but he wisely gave his videotapes to someone else who smuggled them out of East Timor.

The second method of inhibiting outrage is to devalue the target. Indonesian officials made derogatory comments about the protesters, for example calling them “scum”, but this abuse, and Javanese

assumptions of ethnic superiority, had little salience outside Indonesia.

The third method is to reinterpret the events. Indonesian officials blamed the events on the protesters, alleging they provoked the attack and that the shooting was unintentional. They gave a figure of just nineteen dead, later raising it to fifty. A separate investigation counted at least 271 killed.

The fourth method of inhibiting outrage is to use official channels such as inquiries and courts to give the appearance of justice. Immediately after the Dili massacre, the Indonesian government set up an inquiry, which gave mild sentences to a few officials. The Indonesian military had its own inquiry that whitewashed the perpetrators.

The fifth and final method regularly used to inhibit outrage from injustice is intimidation and bribery of targets, witnesses and functionaries. After the shooting, Indonesian troops arrested, beat and killed numerous East Timorese independence supporters. This may have intimidated some East Timorese but it had little effect on international audiences.

By looking at methods of inhibiting outrage, it is possible to gain insight into how to *promote* outrage. Cover-up can be countered by methods such as collecting documents, writing stories and using alternative media. Devaluation can be countered by humanising people under attack, for example through meetings and personal stories. Reinterpretation can be countered by presenting the facts and emphasising the injustice involved. The false appearance of justice through official channels can be countered by avoiding or discrediting these channels. Intimidation and bribery can be countered by refusing to acquiesce and by exposing these methods as improper.

Whistleblowing usually involves a double injustice. First is the problem – corruption, abuse, a hazard to the public – about which a person speaks out. Second is the treatment of the whistleblower. Both of these have the potential to backfire, if people recognise them as matters for concern and information about them is communicated to receptive audiences. Therefore it is predictable that perpetrators will use these five methods of inhibiting outrage. That is exactly what can be observed in case after case.

WHAT HAPPENS TO WHISTLEBLOWERS

Those who attack whistleblowers usually like to keep things quiet. Only foolish employers announce to

the world that they have sacked a prominent dissident. When whistleblowers go to court, employers often agree to a settlement under the condition that neither party speaks about the settlement itself. Acceptance of such a so-called gagging or silencing clause is often a precondition for a settlement.

Whistleblowers often want to keep things quiet too. Many of them are embarrassed and humiliated by the allegations against them and do not want others to be aware of their difficulties. Often they are making complaints to official bodies and assume that publicity will hurt their case. In many cases, lawyers advise keeping quiet. The upshot is that whistleblowers commonly cooperate with employers in covering up information about what is happening. The same applies to the original problem about which they spoke up. The result is that outrage is minimised.

The second method of inhibiting outrage is to devalue the target, in this case the whistleblower. This is part of the standard treatment: harassment, referral to psychiatrists, reprimands and the like are potent means of discrediting a person in the eyes of fellow workers. Spreading of rumours is part of the package, including malicious comments about the whistleblower's work performance, personal behaviour and mental state. To counter this, whistleblowers need to behave impeccably – a difficult task when under intense scrutiny and immense stress – and to document their good performance and behaviour. This can be done, but only if the whistleblower is able and willing to muster the information and make it available.

Reinterpretation of the events is the third method of inhibiting outrage. Employers typically deny any wrongdoing and say that treatment of the employee is completely justified and nothing to do with public interest disclosures. Whistleblowers need to challenge the official line by providing solid documentation for every one of their claims.

The fourth method is to use official channels that give only the appearance of justice. An employer might dismiss an employee and then, when the employee challenges the decision, put the matter through an appeal process that rubber-stamps the original decision. That is indeed what happens in many cases. But there is another dimension to official channels. Whistleblowers regularly go to outside bodies, such as ombudsmen, auditor-generals, anti-corruption commissions, administrative appeals tribunals and courts. They contact politicians. They

try to invoke whistleblower protection laws.

It is easy to assume that these bodies do indeed provide justice. In practice, whistleblowers find that they almost never work. In the largest study of whistleblowers in Australia, William De Maria found that they reported being helped by an official body in fewer than one out of ten approaches, and in many cases they were worse off.⁵

Yet most whistleblowers believe that justice is to be found somewhere in the system. So they make a submission to an agency, wait months or years and then, when the result is negative, go on to another agency. This is an ideal way to reduce outrage from the injustice being done, because the official bodies give the appearance, though seldom the substance, of dispensing justice.⁶

The fifth method of inhibiting outrage is through intimidation and bribery. Whistleblowers are often intimidated by threats and actual reprisals, and the way they are treated serves as an object lesson to co-workers, most of whom avoid the whistleblower for fear of becoming a target themselves. Employees know that their jobs are safer if they do not speak out; sometimes promotions are in order if they join in a witch-hunt.

It is perhaps no surprise that all five methods of inhibiting outrage are found in whistleblower cases. What is disturbing is that whistleblowers so often collaborate in these methods, especially in cover-up and using official channels. They can be highly reluctant to focus on taking their message to the widest possible audience. Yet this has proved time and again the most effective way to mobilise support for addressing the matter raised by the whistleblower and for providing personal protection from reprisals.⁷ It so happens that the recommendations of experienced whistleblower advisers challenge each of the methods of inhibiting outrage.⁸

ANDREW WILKIE

Just a week before the United States government launched its invasion of Iraq in March 2003, Andrew Wilkie, an analyst in the Office of National Assessments, resigned from his position and challenged the Australian government's reasons for joining the assault.⁹ Through good sense and good luck, Wilkie avoided every one of the traps that snare most whistleblowers.

First, and most importantly, Wilkie spoke out in public. He did not report his concerns through

official channels by writing a memo or talking to his boss. Instead, he contacted veteran journalist Laurie Oakes, who made Wilkie's resignation and revelations into a top news story. Wilkie stuck with this approach, doing numerous interviews and giving many talks in the following months. His approach was the antithesis of cover-up.

Second, because of who he was and how he behaved, Wilkie resisted devaluation. His background was conservative. In public, he wore a suit and tie and spoke calmly and factually, a terrific performance for someone under so much stress. His background, demeanour and principled stand undermined attempts to portray him as a traitor or a radical. When government figures made personal aspersions against Wilkie in Parliament and claimed that he was not an Iraq expert, this backfired as journalists exposed their unscrupulous behaviour and double standards.¹⁰

Third, Wilkie kept the focus on the main issue, the official reasons for Australia joining the attack on Iraq. He consistently countered the government line and did not get distracted into issues outside his expertise.

Fourth, by resigning, Wilkie avoided all the usual reprisals at work. He also avoided the exhausting and time-consuming appeals to various official bodies.

Fifth, Wilkie stood up to intimidation. He might have been charged under one of the government acts that require public servants to keep quiet, but by going public he made it difficult for the government to act against him. By speaking out, he also resisted the bribery implicit in holding a job by keeping quiet.

Wilkie had perfect timing. To maximise outrage, a message needs to get to an audience when it is most receptive. Just before the invasion of Iraq was the ideal time, when media attention was intense and debate over justifications was fierce. Wilkie punctured the apparent unanimity of government Iraq experts, and so made a tremendous impact on the debate. Wilkie's timing was also ideal in that mass protest against the Iraq invasion was at its height: there was a large receptive audience for his message.

According to the backfire model, Wilkie did just about everything right. But that does not mean things were easy for him. After all, he sacrificed his career for the sake of speaking out. It is worthwhile remembering though that large numbers of whistleblowers lose their careers, and years of their lives, in a futile effort to obtain justice within the system. Seldom do they have any lasting effect on the issue

about which they raised the alarm. Whistleblowers have much to learn about being effective. Whether or not one agrees with Wilkie's claims about Iraq, his method of speaking out is a model for others.

Whistleblowers and their supporters have much to gain by thinking strategically. If they put themselves in the shoes of the guilty parties, they can imagine tactics that will keep the main issue off the public agenda. Cover-up, attacks on the credibility of the whistleblower, rationalisations and intimidation, are predictable, so preparations should be made to counter them. Official channels also serve to keep issues out of the public eye by moving attention to the treatment of the whistleblower and treating the matter in-house. It is an immense challenge to most whistleblowers to stop assuming justice can be obtained within the system and instead to seek support and vindication in the court of public opinion.

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MR POLLOCK AND THE BLUEWATER BI-LO

1

Mostly it's called shock treatment.

2

Years ago I saw it in a movie: flickering pictures of live, electrified bodies pitching in blue light, still vivid in my memory. Here they call it ECT – electroconvulsive therapy.

ECT, ECT, ECT . . . the trolley clicks along the corridor. I stare at the ceiling lights as I'm parked near a shiny sliding steel door which is shut tight. Don't worry about that film. (You mean the spastic fits, the drooling, sitting in puddles of piss?) It's much more civilised now, by far the best treatment for . . . melancholia. It's a word he obviously relishes, getting the absolute most out of all five syllables and such tone, such structure – *mel*, you know straight away you're sick . . . melancholia, melanoma . . . *an*, building, building, you know the worst is to come . . . *cho*, so low, captures the blackness, the hopelessness . . . *lia*, spent now, sad as a sigh . . .

It's quick, it's painless and there are very few side effects . . . You may feel a bit vague, headaches, tired for a day or so, some short-term memory loss, but that will pass . . .

3

My name is Rob Ross. I am suffering major depression with melancholia after some painful mischance and twenty-six stressful years in advertising. I've been

taking large doses of anti-depressants for over a year, without any real improvement. My psychiatrist, Dr Connor, has finally convinced me to have ECT.

Five of us are waiting now, lying on trolleys, stacked like fish at the market. I'm stiff with fear. The steel door slides open, me first . . .

4

Four women in surgical scrubs are acting out a well-practiced routine. There are no introductions. (How are you Mr Ross, feeling a little less crackers today?) One looms over me with an oxygen mask. A thin smile as she fits it over my nose and mouth. Breathe deeply. The comely young doctor stands behind my head and rubs cool fluid on my temples. This will help the volts flow through bone and brain. I'm not sure if it's in one side and out the other or in both sides and meet in the middle. I raise my eyes and follow the line of her shapely, apple-sized breasts, rising against her tight black sweater, but the effect is lost as I look past them and up her nose, which is not altogether clean. The anaesthetist probes for a vein, swabs and injects the back of my hand. My toes twitch, getting ready for the ride. Lying next to me is an oldish woman attached to some sort of monitor . . . bleep, bleep, blip, bleep . . . Would you mind turning that off? Jesus, my head, my head. Someone shakes my shoulder, calls my name. I am, it seems, in recovery. My head throbs, my neck is

sore, my calves ache from the convulsions. My first session is over, nine more to go.

5

The beginning of the end of my career in advertising was an email from Wayne Bold. It arrived, as they often did, on a Friday afternoon, after Wayne had left the office. “Can you make it to a meeting with Brian Johnston, our boardroom, 9.30 a.m. Monday?”

I’d been meaning to take a couple of days off, I was weary after a three-week shoot on a series of TV commercials and I wanted a break before we edited them. But Brian’s company, York Insurance, was a long-standing client of mine, so I emailed I’d be there.

The campaign I’d developed for York had been the most successful I’d ever done. The original commercials and others on the same theme had been running nationally for twelve years. Tracking surveys showed the ads stuck in people’s minds and sales figures had risen consistently.

There was, however, a problem with the ads. York’s Chairman’s wife didn’t like them, so from time to time Brian was put under pressure to get rid of them.

Poor old Brian. So far he’d resisted the pressure but we would have this conversation every few months:

“When do you think we can change them?”

“You can change them now if you like, mate, but if I were you I’d wait until they stop making you millions.”

Two years ago I sold my Sydney agency to the American giant Barringers Worldwide. They gave me a generous contract to stay on as Creative Director but brought in Wayne, a promising performer from their Melbourne office, as Managing Director.

Wayne and I were about as different as it was possible to be – in temperament, approach to the business, the types of clients we preferred. While I was feeling less and less happy with advertising, Wayne was the complete adman. Even his name was his own creation, changed early in his career from something less remarkable.

No client was off limits to Wayne, and from

the beginning he began courting clients I’d been avoiding for years – tobacco companies, the sleaziest property developers, the most voracious resource companies – they were all the same to Wayne. “If it’s legal, I’ll advertise it,” he said. And more and more characters from these companies were turning up in our offices. They wore expensive suits, cloying after-shave and hair gel, gold watches and wrist chains, had loud voices and names like Whocko, Jazza and Chook. They called Wayne Wayno which made him practically piss himself with pleasure.

Wayne spent a lot of time ‘networking’ – back-slapping and bullshitting his way around any event where prospective clients gathered: the Ad Club, the Marketing Institute, the Public Relations Association, the Institute of Management, the Market Research Society, the Chamber of Commerce, the Mining Industry Council, the Real Estate Institute, Variety Club, Forestry Industry Association, Rotary, Lions, Young Achievers, business dinners, guest speakers, Budget Day Breakfasts, cricket and football clubs and associations, Farmers and Graziers, Young Farmers, exporters, both major political parties . . . he was on countless committees – especially those that gave out awards for advertising and promotion – and here’s a surprise, he won more than his share of awards. In fact, awards were one of the major things in his life . . . his press releases described him as “multi-award-winning adman Wayne Bold”.

He was always careful to make sure his clients got their share of the limelight at awards dinners and always presented them with a framed copy of the award as a reminder they had hired a bona fide advertising genius.

The ads Wayne made were celebrations of the cheesy storyline, the syrupy jingle, the glib tagline and the big production budget. He was cagey but not really bright and had no grasp of strategy, so while his ads won awards, their commercial success was often less evident. This didn’t worry Wayne at all. He’d just put out another press release about his latest award-winning campaign and move on to what he called his “next challenge”.

Still, there were times when Wayne really was challenged, when the right words or images

wouldn't come. What happened then was really quite a show.

He would pace around the agency, holding his head saying "I'm blocked . . . I just can't crack it . . . I'm fucken blocked". He would sigh and seethe and suck his teeth until everyone knew what was coming.

"No interruptions Lauren," he'd snap to his – formerly my – PA and lock himself in his office.

Wayne's office is lined with shelves of books on advertising going all the way back to John Caples and Claude Hopkins. There is probably every *Writers and Art Directors Annual* ever published in the USA, the UK, Europe and Australia; there are books on copywriting, design, typography, logos and photography, back issues of trade magazines, show reels of decades of award-winning TV commercials, tapes of radio ads, books of posters, book jackets and record sleeves, trademarks, packages, magazines, industrial journals, stationery, labels.

He called these his "references", things he copied when he ran out of ideas. Sometimes he would be in there for hours, flicking through pages, playing and replaying commercials. Then, with everyone waiting but trying not to show it, he would burst out of his office, flushed and triumphant: "I've cracked it!" he'd say and then recycle ideas, copy lines, images that went back who knows how long. Lauren called him Captain Xerox.

6

As I came into the boardroom, Wayne Bold flicked his ash blond hair from his eyes and stretched his lips across laser whitened teeth.

"On the dot," he said, gesturing to a chair. Wayne was sitting at the head of the board table flanked by Lauren who was there to take notes on the meeting. She also smiled but more warmly. Opposite her was a fidgety Brian Johnston, who managed a strained grin then shifted his eyes expectantly to Wayne.

"I called this meeting after a conversation with Brian last week while you were out on that shoot. I have to say, Rob, I had no idea that York was unhappy with our TV campaign."

"I didn't know they were unhappy," I said. "I

know Beverley Hingston's unhappy."

"How long have these ads been running? Four, five years?"

"Twelve."

"Twelve years! I had no idea! Maybe we should be, er, revisiting them?"

"Why? They're working as well as ever and our research shows the customers like 'em."

"It's true," said Lauren, maths whiz and queen of media planning.

Wayne silenced her with a sour look.

Brian spoke for the first time: "I know, I know, but Mike Hingston keeps pressuring me to change them."

"Because of what his wife thinks?"

"Well . . . when you look at it that way . . ."

"What's it matter what Beverley Hingston thinks?"

"She nags Mike, Mike nags me."

"Doesn't she understand the ads weren't made to please her; that they're making money for York?"

"Twelve years," said Wayne, "that's a pretty good run, Rob. Have they won any awards?"

"I've never entered them in awards. I told you, they work, they don't need any awards."

"OK Brian," said Wayne. "We understand the problem. Give us a day or two to bat it around and we'll get back to you."

After Brian left, Wayne turned to me. "I'll tell you straight, Rob, I think we need a change, a fresh approach, a new campaign."

"With a big fat production budget?"

"Of course!" Again the lips stretched over the teeth.

"And what if the new ads don't work as well as the old ones?"

"You leave that to me. I'll take personal charge of the new campaign."

My anger suddenly flared. My words exploding.

"I've spent years on this account. It's the best campaign we've ever done. And you're taking me off it?"

"Well, yes, I thought you could take over the Budget Furniture account."

"Cheap fucking furniture retailers. That's what

you think I should be doing?”

“They’d benefit from your, er, creative flair.”

“Bullshit! That account’s a creative’s graveyard. Tony Hope, Marie Stephanov, Gerry O’Connor all worked on Budget in the last couple of years. Where are they now? Gone, resigned, buggered off, that’s where!”

“OK, if you feel that way why not take a break? You’re, ah, overwrought and you’ve been working too hard. When did you last have a holiday?”

“He never takes holidays,” said Lauren, doodling, not looking up from her note pad.

Wayne leaned back in his chair. “A month, two months could make all the difference. After all you’re owed the time. We can talk it over when you get back. Meanwhile I’ll get some new ideas for York. Should be quite a challenge.”

7

My mind was clouded with anger: with Wayne for doing this to me and with myself for not seeing it coming. I gathered my stuff off the table and headed for the lobby. My feet, so heavy . . . “ordeen” said the lift.

Going down to the car park I knew something was wrong . . . I felt like my head was full of small black crawling things, scuttling from the back of my neck over my brain, hairy feet in the crevices, clinging behind my eyes, inside my chest . . . still now, waiting . . . this black presence . . . “arpark” said the lift.

I got into the silver Jaguar, heard the solid sound of the door closing, the low grunt of the motor firing, nosed out into the traffic and drove for four hours, no idea where, remembered only fragments.

City streets, freeway, back roads, stretches of coast, blurred rocks and she-oaks, guide posts, cattle grazing on the brow of a hill, tall eucalypts, towns, roadhouses, bridges, paddocks, cars, trucks, caravans pooling across my eyes.

My first clear memory was sitting in the car in a roadhouse car park. Wet with sweat. My jaw was clenched, my hands stiff from gripping the steering wheel . . . blackness in my head.

Shakily I drove home to my shack at Bluewater,

dragged myself to bed. After a time the blackness receded a little and I began to feel warm, foetal, almost invisible. I stayed there for many days. The answering machine took messages which I didn’t return. Twice someone knocked at the door but I lay doggo and they went away. The newspapers and mail I piled unopened on the kitchen table. My two black cats loved all this; they curled up on my bed like speech marks and purred as they always did when close to me. When they hassled me I fed them on the back deck and we all took time to piss and shit, then went back to bed. I didn’t eat much but it felt good – soon I might disappear. Going out was like deciding to be born; mostly I decided against it. In three weeks I went out twice; once to the supermarket, which was a disaster, and once to see Dr Connor, which also had its low points.

Sometimes I thought about suicide but was too scared to try and fail. Jump off a cliff and end up in a wheelchair . . . carbon monoxide, sleeping tablets, whisky – brain damage, a vegie. What I wanted was simple: a low continuous electronic hum . . . the blackness in my head concentrated into a single straight black line on a printout. The latest in the series of tablets I’d been taking did not make me feel better. What sort of drug is it that has only side effects? The leaflet that came with them said the most common ones were: dizziness, dry mouth and throat, upset stomach, loss of appetite, constipation, sweating, headache, drowsiness, insomnia, anxiety, weakness, lack of energy, tremor, blurred vision, loss of interest in sex, abnormal dreams, increased blood pressure. I experienced many of the side effects, and even discovered some new ones, although they could have been new symptoms that the drug also didn’t treat. The leaflet made no extravagant claims – like curing you.

8

My visits to Dr Connor generally made me feel better, giving me some hope for improvement and even recovery. But not the visit that week. It was raining, the sky low and leaden and the black crawlers were massing as I climbed, heavily, the steps to the Georgian house where he had his rooms. There were

three – yes, three – large doormats placed carefully in a line leading to the door and a prominent sign: PLEASE WIPE YOUR FEET BEFORE ENTERING. The doctor was being extra, extra, extra careful that his immaculate, thick, white, wool carpet would not be soiled. Cleanliness, tidiness and security were among Dr Connor’s main concerns. Coming from the shack, where there are no lawns or paths, my boots were stuck with mud so I wiped and scraped until they seemed clean. I pressed the buzzer and identified myself over the intercom. The overhead camera turned and tilted, the red light blinked . . . check and double check . . . the electronic lock pipped, clicked and the door opened. The receptionist showed me to the waiting room with its pristine white tones and surfaces. Neatly stacked at perfect right angles to the edge of the gleaming cream coffee table were magazines: *Business Review Weekly*, *The Bulletin*, *National Geographic*, *Gardener*, *Home Beautiful*, *Gourmet Traveller*, a stack for each. On the walls, paintings and prints – chosen I’m sure for their tonal rather than artistic qualities – were also placed just so.

I sat on an off-white leather sofa and waited. Suddenly, over unseen speakers, came loud operatic music, a soprano lamenting something in Italian. The volume and pitch pierced my head like a power drill and when the doctor called me in I was rattled, ready to run.

Dr Connor is short, rotund, balding, dapper. His spectacles hang on a string round his neck. His demeanour is that of a man in control, proud of the world he has created. The white-on-white decor of his room echoes that of the waiting room. More importantly, it is quiet. His chair is positioned close to the door, some distance from the chair where his patient sits. So, if a deranged person tried to leap at him and throttle him, it could not have been done in one bound. Two, two-and-a-half bounds were required, by which time he would have made it to the door. He had nothing to fear from me. I was barely able to speak and sit upright at the same time.

The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) measures the way depressed people think and feel across twenty-one indicators. These include: sadness, hopelessness,

failure, dissatisfaction, guilt, punishment, disappointment, self-blame, self-harm, crying, irritation, inability to make decisions, feeling ugly, inability to work, sleeplessness, tiredness, concerns over appetite, weight and health and loss of interest in sex.

The more severe depressives have scores over 26. The maximum is 63. Mine was its highest ever, 52. When Dr Connor asked me how my BDIs were, I said: “Jesus, does this disease give you beady eyes as well?” He gave me a look that said this is not a thing to joke about.

The argument was polite but an argument it was, and it gained intensity as the consultation progressed. I told him what had happened and, after taking careful notes, he again recommended ECT. I declined, asking him why my medication didn’t work. The hour passed slowly, with lengthy discussions of side effects, symptoms and alternative medications. I asked for more time to think about ECT. The doctor was not happy but had no choice but to agree.

He walked out behind me when I went to pay my account and as we passed the vacant waiting room, I heard him inhale dramatically through his nose. Then, like a surgeon calling for a vital instrument he practically screamed: “Glenda, the dust buster!” The waiting room carpet had two dark brown mud smudges close to where I’d been sitting.

“That was you, wasn’t it?”

“I don’t know . . . I did wipe my feet.”

“Not well enough, not nearly well enough.”

His face had become florid, his voice had risen to a near-demented trill. Glenda used the dust buster (also painfully loud) in an ineffectual attempt to suck in the sticky mud.

“Dammit, *dammit*,” said the doctor. “We’ll have to call the carpet cleaner!”

“Well, I’m sorry, I really am.”

I opened the front door. “I did wipe my feet.” He was so angry that his voice had become almost as loud and shrill as the soprano’s.

“Next time (I think he almost said if there is a next time) take your . . . boots off before you come in!”

“I will if you don’t play that fucking awful music!”

Later he rang me at home, explaining that it was the third time that week that people had tracked mud in, sheepishly explaining the three doormats. I stayed in bed, and let him apologise to the answering machine.

9

My sensitivity to even moderately loud sudden noise also figured in the disastrous visit to the supermarket. I chose the local Bi-Lo, where I hardly ever went, instead of the big Woolies down the road, where they knew me well. To avoid meeting people I went early in the morning, just after opening time, newspapers still stacked at the door. The aisles seemed deserted as I moved among them, slowly filling my trolley. Slowly because depression makes it hard to make even simple decisions. Ensnared in the agony of indecision I wrestled over which item, which brand, which colour, texture, flavour, additives, quality, quantity, price – alone in the silence of the aisles. Vegemite, only one brand, should be easy, but big or small? The big jar looked too big. But I always seemed to be running out . . . go for the big. Honey . . . clear not creamed but which brand? Capilano, Barnes, Heritage, Black & Gold, Johnnos Bush, Johnnos Clover, Leatherwood? A jar or a plastic bottle with a spout? Get sticky streaks anyway . . . Just grab one, no . . . another, no . . . Close your eyes . . . ah no, Black & Gold . . . grab again, put it in the trolley, don't look at it . . . Keep moving! Muesli . . . peach and pecan, tropical fruits, apricot and almond, fruit and nut, Uncle Toby's Nut Feast, Kellogg's Apple With A Hint of Cinnamon, Sanitarium Honey Weets . . . Christ, Christ, just grab one of the mueslis, no, not the one with peach . . . Cat food . . . Whiskas is the one they like but it should be less than that – \$1.31 for a small tin. I didn't see that behind me the owner was preparing to give the floor a quick early morning once-over with a large electrical floor cleaner. When he hit the on switch it sounded like someone had fired up a 747. I pushed the trolley away and, yelling, tried to run and crashed into a

large display of Doritos at a crossroads in the aisles. This created the most catastrophic chain reaction.

The heavy Doritos stand slammed into the shelving at the end of two aisles so that stuff from both sides smashed, spilled, dripped and thudded onto the floor – bottles and jars broke, plastic containers bounced crazily, cans thumped and got dented or rolled, smeared with sauces and soft drinks . . . lumps of tomato paste, a collage of pickles, pickled onions, gherkins. Most of the cardboard packets held together but some, mostly sugar and flour, burst open in large and small clouds and explosions. I danced around distractedly, trying to catch things before they fell, holding my ears and yelling. I couldn't control the yells; they echoed after all the other noise had stopped. My head was sticky. I put my hand up and realised I'd been cut, blood running down my cheek. I watched it dripping through my fingers.

The disaster area looked like a giant abstract painting. The lumps and colours, pools, slicks and sludges, jagged jars, shattered and cracked bottles, shards of glass, liquids spilled, splattered and smeared, dented tins of spaghetti and baked beans, tuna, smoked oysters, John West Scottish Sardines, puddles of prune and cranberry juice, slimy bottles of Diet Coke, Vanilla Coke, Ginger Ale, Lemon Lime Mineral Water . . . vinegar, raw sugar, Bundaberg White Sugar, White Wings Self Raising Flour, the plastic bags wet, red-spot-special labels floating and cardboard boxes soaked.

The owner's face was dead white while he looked at me, still hopping from one leg to the other, trying to save some packets of Cheese Supreme Doritos. I think the yelling and the blood saved me; the threat of a personal injury claim; head wounds, even small ones, bleed such a lot. My hands shook, thoughts spun wildly through my mind. Instinctively, I moved towards the door.

"You OK, Mr . . . ah?"

"Pollock," I made a gesture of remorse and helplessness. "Jack Pollock." I knew I'd never be coming back.

WIN FOR LIFE

MID-MORNING, I order my latte from Bambini and watch people pass in and out of the Downing Centre court. Once, while waiting for a coffee, I saw an argument erupt between a thin, greasy-haired man and his estranged partner, who held their daughter by her shoulders as a shield. The child stared at the ground, her arms limp, as though dislocated. I wondered who would win the court case – the one with a house full of furniture or the one who saved her loose change in a Nescafé jar.

Once I've bought my coffee, I go to the newsagent's to collect the *Sydney Morning Herald* and some Scratchies for the boy. Usually I buy him \$2 Scratchies, but today I get a \$4 'Win for Life' – he might win \$50,000 a year for the next twenty years.

I sit on the edge of his desk; from his face I see that he's tired again. I push the Scratchie towards him. I want to cup his cheek in my hand and wipe away the shadows beneath his eyes. He scrapes at the silver gum with a paper clip. He wins a free Scratchie, but the 'Win for Life' logo doesn't appear.

"Maybe next time," I say.

I WORK AT a credit card company, writing letters to clients whose accounts are overdue. It's a dull and unforgiving job. I have a scholarship to study in London and I can leave when I like. Yet, each morning when I step out of the elevator at Level 12 and into the cramped office, I'm alert and electric, waiting for my first glimpse of him.

It was his trim waist and tight ass that attracted me when I walked past him, a year ago. I stood at the photocopier and absently copied some documents, watching him lean over a desk, reading a newspaper. I'd seen him around, but never paid him much attention.

Later, I went to his desk to ask him a trivial, work-related question.

"Yes, ma'am?" he asked. I laughed at his greeting, then passed him a file. His parents were Korean and he'd grown up in Bowral. I watched his black eyes as he read the file and answered my question. Not many people would have called me ma'am. He'd surprised me and I liked it.

"TELL ME ABOUT your family." I nudged him, curled up by his side. Cicadas droned in the gum tree outside my window and the fan whirred slowly from side to side. I pulled the sheet around my neck. Our body temperatures were always at extremes – mine too cold, his too hot.

"Why?" His tone was guarded.

"I want to know."

He described how they'd cramped in a boat for weeks, feeling sick when the weak motor faltered. They were silent for most of the journey, stifled with thoughts of clouds tangled among the maples and poplars in the mountains, of the air of the village thick with moisture and tension, of the gunshots in the afternoons. When they stumbled into the humid heat of Darwin, they were sunburnt and shaky with

hunger. The shore was blindingly white and angry wasps, whose nests had been disturbed, buzzed nearby. The locals appeared and his family struggled to pull fragments of English from their memories, forcing out the odd words through dry mouths.

At lunchtime we sit in Hyde Park. I imagine taking off his clothes and stroking the hard arch of his back. His skin is smooth and taut, unlike mine which often breaks out in eruptions which I pick absently as I write.

We lie back on the grass, first checking for seagull droppings. The boy tells me about a job he's applying for in Adelaide with a ship-building company. An ibis wanders by hoping for the remains of my sandwich.

"When do you find out about it?" I ask, reaching for my water bottle.

"In about a month."

I kick the ibis away.

ON THE BUS on the way home, squashed between bodies, I cannot concentrate on my book. I think of him pulling up my shirt, unhooking my bra and cupping my breasts.

After sex our conversations were relaxed and sprawling. I gave him the European myths which he'd grown up without: the story of Helen and the Trojan war, the Princess and the Pea, Hansel and Gretel. Sometimes he fell asleep as I spoke, but the night I told him about Pandora's Box, he suddenly leaned over me. "Tell me that one again."

"What're you going to give me for it?" I asked, slyly.

"Nothing, unless you tell me. Then you'll find out."

"Well, Pandora was given a box and told she wasn't to look in it. But she was a curious girl and one day she decided to have a squiz. When she opened the box, all the evils of the world flew out – disease, jealousy, hatred, envy. She covered her ears and shut her eyes as they rushed over her head, but when they'd all gone she took her hands away. And there, in the box, she saw a tiny little thing – it was Hope."

He was silent, watching me intently, his pupils

almost filling his eyes.

"How do you know Hope's wings weren't broken?" he asked.

"I don't. The myth doesn't say anything about that."

He leaned forward and kissed me gently, then pressed a path down my belly and between my legs.

The bus pulls up at my stop. I buy milk from the corner store and smile tiredly at the Pakistani boy behind the counter. When I get home I make myself a cup of tea, water my Madonna lilies and watch the news.

Unable to sleep that night, I get up and replace the newspaper linings of the cupboards. They'd been chewed by a rat that took me two months to kill.

I pull out an advertisement I recognise from two years ago. "We decide who comes into this country and the circumstances in which they come," Howard declares. I rip it into little pieces. My anger keeps me awake for another hour.

OUR FIRST FUCK was hurried and nervous, snatched in our lunch break in his father's apartment in the city.

"We're both leaving," he said afterwards, his head against my chest.

"I don't care." I preferred to be with him, then sort out the mess later, when we went our ways.

I asked him to come over to my flat. I wanted to stroke his smooth chest again and trace the Korean characters tattooed onto his left arm.

I'd never been in love before. None of the thousands of love stories that I'd read in books, seen in movies and heard from my friends prepared me for the sense of imprisonment it brought. But, having fallen, I suddenly understood what it was that made a prince hack through briar to reach his girl, and what made a princess hope, through years of boredom and loneliness and longing, for her man to reappear.

I WALK TO work in the mornings, listening to Crowded House on my cheap CD player which skips when the batteries wear out. Today the air is clear and biting. I imagine the boy fucking me against a

wall, my breasts squashed against his chest, hurting. I taste his saliva and hear his breath in my ear. I feel myself getting wet.

I pass the homeless men sitting on blue milk crates by the door of the bakery, hoping for bread. They live at the Salvation Army shelter across the road. One of them says something to me but I can't hear what it is because 'Don't Dream it's Over' is playing. I quicken my step to keep up with the beat.

When I give the boy a \$5 and a \$2 Scratchie, I can tell he only managed a few hours' sleep the night before. He's doing seventy-hour weeks to support his sick mother and repay his bank loan for his naval architecture degree. When he leaves our office he works in a restaurant and on the weekends in a supermarket. I don't often sleep with him, these days.

HE TOLD ME how his parents had moved to Bowral and how, when he was born, they kept on working. They needed the money. During the day he was looked after by friends; it was a different friend each week. He doesn't really have a sense of home. When he told me this I wanted to weep, but he didn't seem bothered by it.

His parents pieced together English and moved to Sydney to complete their university degrees. He played rugby in the long twilight with his mates, breathing in the scents of sweat, frangipani and steaming asphalt.

I never thought I'd fall for someone who was passionate about rugby. My family never watched sport. My father was a watercolourist and my mother read fiction voraciously. The telly was always tuned to the ABC.

When Australia played its first game at the Rugby World Cup, I found the boy wearing a Wallabies' jumper. "What's this?" I asked disparagingly.

"It's a rugby jumper," he said, equally condescending. He went to the pub after work to watch the game.

That evening, while the rest of Sydney watched the football at the stadium or in a pub, I soaked in the bath. I thought about his thumb pushing over my nipples, then heard the doorbell. I hurried from the bath, wrapping myself in my pink towel. Drip-

ping wet, I opened the door. It was him.

"What happened to your game?" I asked, concerned.

"I'm still trying to figure that out myself."

I smiled and pulled him to me. He smelled of beer and cigarette smoke. The towel slipped to the floor and his fingers reached into my cunt.

Afterwards, I lay by his side, listening to his heartbeat. He began to tickle me and didn't stop until I bashed him with a pillow. I was jealous at how quickly he could fall asleep.

THE AFTERNOON IS the longest stretch of the day. Whenever I get bored, I compose luridly erotic emails for the boy. Today I work in my wall scene and feel fluid dripping into my undies again. The email will give him an erection. The thought makes me smile. It always does.

Soon enough, an email comes back. To tease him, I correct his spelling mistakes.

"English is my second language," he protests.

"So what?" I reply. His spelling is irrelevant; it's the nature of his words that excites me. His wit is as sharp as a blade; he lays traps for me and I trip, surprised at being caught out.

We once joked about what it would take to get me into bed.

"\$50,000," I wrote to him.

The next day, he gave me fifty thousand Korean won.

"This is only fifty Australian dollars!"

"You didn't specify a currency."

"I did too. I said Australian."

"Look, I've still got your email. I'll send it back to you – the 50,000 didn't have a dollar sign before it."

I paused, considering. "You'll take the dollar sign out!"

He began to laugh. He sent me pdfs of dollar bills in an email and, when I told him this wasn't good enough, a bunch of proteas with 49,950 written on the card. The flowers shut me up.

HIS FAMILY HAD been crossing a bridge over the Nak-tong River with a crowd of villagers and their oxen

when it shook and crumbled with explosives. Falling carts knocked people underwater and babies were pushed underfoot. The boy's father and mother, who'd almost crossed the bridge, were close to the bank. They scrambled out and, miraculously, found the boy's grandfather being helped to the shallows by two of his daughters.

Above the screaming and bellowing of oxen, he heard the Yankee accents. He didn't want to stay in a country where the allies were their enemies. He gathered up the remnants of his family and continued to the coast.

At the estuary, the smells of dank water and rotting fish were overpowering. The air freshened once they were out at sea, but the children in the boat wouldn't stop crying.

I OPEN THE door and find the boy standing there. He kisses me on the cheek instead of reaching for my ass and I know something is wrong.

"You got the job?" I ask.

He nods.

I turn away, leading him down the hall, past the bedroom. I sit on the couch and he makes me a cup of tea. The Madonna lilies have flowered, dusting the floorboards with their white pollen.

"Here." He hands me the cup and sits beside me. His thigh is hot.

I bite my lip to keep it from trembling, then take a breath. "I'm holding on."

"How can you think that? It's illogical! This isn't one of your stupid fairytales. I'll be away for years!"

The tea spills as I slam the cup onto the coffee table. "Don't shout at me!"

"I'm sorry." He draws me to him, pulling my legs over his lap. "It's just . . . you can create stories, but you can't create your fate."

"I know that. But if there were no stories, there wouldn't be any hope, would there?"

He doesn't reply. I feel his erection beneath my calves.

"I love you," I tell him. He doesn't respond, but he doesn't need to. I've caught glimpses of it in his face

— a certain tenderness, like a mother's as she watches her child teasing the cat, or singing to himself.

Soon he's fucking me in the hallway. Skin peels from my back but I hardly notice it.

It was illogical, I thought as I closed my eyes with ecstasy, but not impossible.

IN TWO WEEKS he's gone. There's no point in staying any longer. I hand in my notice and pack up my desk. I print out all the emails we've written; they take up two reams of paper. I give away my ferns and cacti, then go to the travel agent and book my ticket to London.

"One way, please," I tell the woman behind the desk. "I won't be back for a few years."

As I wait for her to offer me a quote, I look at my reflection in the window and at the people walking beyond it. There's an Aboriginal woman by the side of the street, her curly hair knotted and bedraggled. She's holding out her hands for money.

It occurs to me that it didn't matter if Hope's wings were broken. What mattered was that Hope was there. I reach under my skivvy and pick at the scab on my back.

"The best is probably \$1500, via Singapore," says the travel agent.

"That'll do," I reply, taking out my credit card.

When I step outside, I tip some coins into the woman's hand.

I lie awake at night, remembering the prickliness of his cheeks when he hadn't shaved. Or his tongue working between my legs until I arched my back in orgasm. I think of his acrid semen spurting into my mouth and of his slender fingers weaving through mine, gripping them when he came. I miss being able to turn to him when I've had a bad dream.

A friend tells me there's more chance of being struck by lightning than of winning a Scratchie, but I persist. I want to wake up next to him in the mornings, his body curled around mine like a seed pod.

That's why, every morning in London on my way to uni, I stop for my latte, the *Guardian* and another Scratchie. If someone had written the ending to our story, I could only hope that it was a good one.

EARLY DAYS

“OFTEN WHEN WE think we are writing one thing we are in fact writing something else,” Joe intoned, more than once. “What you consciously devise is not where your unconsciousness is taking you,” he elaborated. For all his cultivation of the Lawson laconic mode of Australian demotic, he was often drawn to elaborate. Perhaps it was the potentiality for the exploitation of this that he envied in my academic employment, perhaps in his secret dreams he would have liked to have stood there, capped and gowned, elaborating in panelled halls. Well, now he has his opportunity in that college of buggers and spies. His words, I hasten to add. Though the teaching component of the fellowship, he told me, was something he had managed to have waived for his tenure. It was the teaching component that had made the fellowship so unattractive, certainly to me. That would have discouraged me from applying for it, had it ever been advertised. But apparently there was no advertisement. It was cosied up by invitation. Joe was never one to advocate public examinations and careers transparently open to talent. Competition, market forces, all that ideology that he proclaimed, was for the others. Indeed it was properly, precisely, an ideology: something that masked the true workings of society. Even its originators and progenitors could be heard to complain that it had never in fact been introduced into practice. It had remained a slogan to mystify the middle-class masses, and Joe had been one of the happy advocates, though surely he must have known in the depths and shallows of his

cynicism that things were never done like that, that society functioned on a system of deals and favours and controls and patronage, and the wise positioned themselves in order to benefit from the system.

So I am uncertain what it is that I am writing about Joe, uncertain indeed whether he is the subject or the pretext. Speaking to Joe recently by telephone – no longer do we meet, take lunch together, drink together; indeed rarely do we communicate telephonically, but I had rung to suggest lunch, which he declined – I suggested perhaps, if he were uncertain what now to write, if, as he was indicating, writing fiction became only harder, not easier, as one continued, that he might write his memoirs. He was appalled. Appalled silence and appalled expostulation struggled for simultaneous expression, enacting all the difficulties he confessed now to encounter with his writing. I had not realised I had made so lucky a hit, if lucky hits were the basis of our relationship, as in the past I felt he had seemed to imply, or as his actions had appeared to indicate. There were many memoirs poised for publication, or on the verge of being written, or at least postulated, held in suspense somewhere between thought and action, he told me. It came across as a kind of threat, but that may have been only his verbal mannerism, or my habitual interpretation of the mannerism. But that he should write a memoir, the idea rendered him speechless, incoherent. To find something that did that was always gratifying, and succumbing to gratification I failed to press my advantage. Was it because everything

he had written to date was memoir and there was nothing left to exploit? I might have asked. Memoir disguised as fiction, of course, but that has always been the way of the best fiction. Or was it because his life story was so fraught with the inexpressible, the inadmissible? What was it that he was concealing, that produced such an excess of refusal? What secret life was he fearful of disclosing, beneath the multiple secret lives he had already presented *pour épater les bourgeois*? Were there perhaps things that we who claimed proletarian origins and sympathies, even if we could hardly any longer claim identification, might find less delightful, things that we might find totally unacceptable? Would he care? Put like that I doubted it. Were there materials here that might reward a careful and comprehensive investigation? Or if not comprehensive, at least a pointed one?

It is not an investigation that I propose to undertake. I had enough exposure to the Joe psyche in those years when we were close. They were so long ago. Within the span of things they were so few, so brief. But they had an impact far outweighing mere chronological time, far beyond the mere measure of their days. Perhaps at that age one lives more intensely. Perhaps in the early years of one's discovery of the city, events and characters are imprinted more deeply, more vividly than in later stages. Perhaps it is merely a matter of first exposures making their mark on the unmarked sheet, gradually occupying the field until they have filled it, after which there is no white space remaining for later encounters.

There is enough, anyway, in those early impressions without resorting to investigative reportage. I have come to disbelieve in investigative reportage, anyway. I doubt that any journalist goes to that much trouble or takes that much risk. Joe had been a journalist. The revelations ascribed to the investigative all come, I have little doubt, from official leaks, from covert briefings, from unidentified sources who have an interest in manipulating events, or the account of events. The patient search along the paper trail, the brave and lonely vigil down the mean streets, these are just so much guff, like television crime-show celebrations of police procedure. It is just a matter of informers. I suppose I could advertise, in a grape-

vine sort of way, that I am contemplating writing a memoir of Joe, even if not Joe's memoirs. This might send its vibrations along the sticky reticulations of the web he inhabits. Information might be forthcoming. But I am not sure it is that that arouses my interest. I have information enough. This is my answer when enthusiasts and others advocate using the net, the world wide web, accessing information electronically. I have never found myself short of information. That is not to say I have always known the truth. That is something else again. But I am not convinced that more information would make the truth any clearer. The problem has always been to read even a part of what is available, and to sort out what of that is likely to be relevant or useful. Or true. The problem is selecting and reading and absorbing and understanding, digesting and contemplating and coming to some satisfactory interpretation. There is much about Joe's life I do not know. He would remind and assure me of that constantly. I am not claiming or complaining of an information overload in relation to him. But I have quite enough stored and imprinted and recollected. I have quite enough written and published if it comes to that. But there is still much to be understood. It is a matter of that going over the same ground again and again until it speaks to us, to cite another of Joe's recurrent aphorisms. And after all, it may not be about Joe that ultimately I am to write.

I REMEMBER ONCE saying of Joe that he was the reason for my returning to this city. And receiving what my father used to call an old-fashioned look. We were down in the basement of some gentrified terrace in East Sydney, an area of petrol fumes and prostitution and illegal gambling and dubious restaurants. My English agent had asked me about the prospects of establishing an office in Sydney. I had written a report enthusing on the possibilities. There were no agents practising in Sydney at that time. I received thanks, though no payment, and the office was established and here we were in it, the Australian agent and Joe and me. The agency thrived, though it never did me any good. It never placed anything of mine, though it did undo a cou-

ple of deals by demanding too much. One was an East German anthology. "You should be relieved they kept you out of it," said Joe. "I am pleased", he continued, "not to have been invited." I found that odd. In those days, probably in these days, little pleasure was to be found in not being invited into anthologies. It was one of the earlier of his declarations against the Communist world. Perhaps he had always been like that and I had never noticed. Or perhaps he did indeed undergo a development and this was one of its significant moments, an historic announcement.

What I meant, I think, was not so much that it was Joe that had attracted me back, but the world that Joe and I shared, the fact that there were two of us constituting a literary society, that we were not alone as we pursued our discoveries, our explorations through this dusty gentle city, its bars, its eating places, its pokey little offices in basements and up narrow flights of stairs. Sydney was still in its sleep in those years. It had not been drilled and shaken and demolished and rebuilt. There were lots of bars but not many restaurants. It was not a public city, it did not proclaim much. It was not much known to world travellers. Discoveries, once made, remained: it had not entered that ceaseless pace of change and transience, that endless process of demolition and massive growth. Discovering it was discovering ourselves, finding new sites for the new explorations of our own hopes and desires and partial realisations.

AT THIS STAGE Joe was employed. Or perhaps not. Perhaps that was an earlier stage. When I first met him he was employed, though not for long. "Writing is my employment," he would state. Not explain, not argue. Writing was his employment and society was there to facilitate it. Eventually when society failed to deliver any more willing young working girls to support him, federal funding of the arts took over. From being a drain on the national treasury he became a national treasure. Years later, many years later, he assured me it had not been a struggle. "I have always lived well. I have always received above the basic wage." "And spent well beyond it," his manager added. I would look at labourers digging

up the roads, at hot, tired bus drivers driving through the hot tired summers, at truck drivers and office workers and builders on the girders of the high-rise blocks rising up in the re-drawn city, and think of the sweat and toil and tedium with which they earned their far-from-generous incomes, and think of the percentage sliced off year after year to support Joe and the other national treasures. It was not something I expressed too often. Those same workers were taxed to provide the educational structure that paid for me. I could always have said: but I give in return, I teach, I mark, I assess, I attend meetings and I write on top of it; but I had doubts about it all. About education. Still, it in some way satisfied my conscience. Whereas with Joe I was affronted. I disapproved. It was of course the mode to affect an effortlessness. To produce but not to be seen to work. And Joe simulated that with an admirable ease. He was never seen to work. He wrote, if he wrote, when he wrote, with no public indication of production. Works would appear, but so would Joe, Joe with far more regularity than the works, a shining model of the leisured, the superstructural, in the bars, in the restaurants and in the other dives of that dusty, golden-morning city.

WHEN WE FIRST met he was employed. One hesitates to say worked. He was in a pokey little adult education office near the bottom of George Street where the old literary cultures of the city had once been sited, the weekly *Bulletin*, the publishing house of Anguish and Robbery, just out of sight of the quay where Conrad had once roamed and where Henry Lawson used to beg for the price of a drink. In such environs I think he felt he could safely be seen to walk a pavement and enter a staircase with the daily commuters, even if, especially if, he could on some pretext exit it shortly afterwards.

The idea of adult education had been a part of my childhood. My father, after the toil of the foundry, would study philosophy at adult education classes under one of the canons of the cathedral. It offered a vision, a taste, of the cultured life of the mind that the institutions denied to those who sustained their wealth. It was a socialist vision of access. It was a ges-

ture of recompense, a way in which the blessed could help raise the unfortunate and excluded to some notion of the better life. And here, transported from its English origins, it flourished. I rhapsodised about it. Joe shuffled his hands uneasily on his uncluttered desk and suggested we went out for a drink, down the rickety staircase, down the sloping street, past the silent Brooklyn and along to the Newcastle.

How long was it before I began to realise he did not share my socialist visions? How long before I recognised that he paid no tribute to the dignity of labour? These were the mainstays of my commitment; how could I comprehend that he held them in contempt? Because they were phantasms based on so little experience, because they were touchstones of guilt-haunted affirmation rather than hard-won truths hewn from the mines of practical encounters, I had little by which to assess their role in Joe's pantheon. For me they were values I held to by the will. This privileged life of the university, from which I might have a morning free, indeed many mornings free, and afternoons and evenings too, in which I could stand at the Newcastle bar drinking beers at eleven or twelve or two or five, or all of them until closing time at ten, the canonical hours of Joe's foundation. His uncloistered, unconstrained Comusian rout, his community of one, was a life surrounded by a penumbra of anxieties for me, guilts that I should have it so easy while others (my father looming large in this, but countless others I might see or envisage or conceptualise all around), had it so hard. And even if they didn't have it hard, who else had it so easy? Well, Joe, Joe standing there with his beers, insisting in his somewhat taut and strangulated tones, in that tenor of anxiety he never totally shed, that we must be free of guilt, our first priority must always be to free ourselves of all restrictions and prescriptions.

That adult education had once been a socialist initiative there was no doubt. Indeed it may well have been targeted or penetrated by communists. Joe's mission, imperfectly understood by me, was perhaps to save it from such. If saving it from such might seem like undermining and destroying it, who was to say that was not a good thing? These were Cold

War days. Better raze an institution to the ground than let the enemy possess it. I did not understand these things then. But I think Joe did.

Certainly workers were not beings Joe held in respect. He showed no commitment to advancing their cause, removing their shackles, giving them voice. He held that giving some other person or group a voice was patronising; it was difficult enough to find your own authentic voice; though authentic was perhaps not a word he would have used. But finding his own voice, or finding organs through which to vocalise, was something with which he was concerned. On one of those early occasions when we met he produced his journal. Or perhaps not precisely his journal. The indeterminacy about the possessive indicates the problems that were to arise. It was a house journal, devoted to adult educational themes, and, who knows, to workers' advancement in its earliest days. Joe saw its potential. He took over the editorship and began to turn it into a literary journal, an intellectual review, like the Americana he so admired, *Partisan* and such like. There was a long way to go before those institutional products on bulky matt paper, funded and subscribed to and funded again, could be replicated. But he had his sights on them. Perhaps he envisioned international conferences of international editors in international centres. Almost certainly he did. And what we dream of with determination in some way we ultimately attain. In the end, in these days as I write, he has attained the international travel and the international conferences, without the demeaning worry of any editorial responsibilities, like a senior minister without portfolio, an editor without a magazine. It suits him.

Down in the Newcastle he unbuckled his briefcase. His briefcase was his protection, his insignia, his subterfuge. Walking out of the office with his briefcase he did not need to proclaim that he was off to a business engagement. The briefcase advertised business. It was his passport in and out of the office in those days before electromagnetic swipe cards.

He showed me the journal with a charming diffidence. He did have charm. Often when I write or think about him I neglect to acknowledge that. But it was one of his available qualities and he was able

to deploy it. He did not ask, "What do you think?" but that was implicit in handing it across. It seemed disappointingly slight. I had expected something more substantial, and this was thin and stapled and in a funny format, some 1950s institutional, educational format, a larger page size than the traditional quarterlies, but not large enough to be imposing, and because a larger page than the traditional quarterly and with more words per page, it had fewer pages, hence in part its thinness. It looked like a church parish magazine. I had indeed written for a parish magazine at least once. The neophyte writer: how to impress your parents and neighbours and vicar about the seriousness of your vocation. I was not eager to write for such again.

"Perhaps," said Joe, "you would like to review for us."

What could I say but yes?

"Once in a while," he added.

He was not going to offer me a regular feature. Perhaps that was a relief. But once in a while, well, why not?

"We thought you might like to review this."

He produced the latest issue of *Meanjin*, that portentous, prosperous looking quarterly from Melbourne. I felt disappointment. Already. Reviewing the latest in international books, that was part of the literary apprenticeship I envisaged for myself. That was how you started a literary career. As long as you didn't end a literary career still reviewing there was nothing wrong with it, everything to be said for it. But reviewing another magazine; it did not seem to me the sort of thing that was done. I had never seen magazines reviewed in the review pages; the review pages reviewed books. But I did it. Later, when consistently *Meanjin* rejected everything I sent to them, I wondered if I had been set up. Had my demanding, high-minded, high-standardised, brisk, severe tone been resented? Almost certainly. And had Joe suspected that that would be the tone I would adopt? Almost certainly. He was astute, another quality, like charm, that I insufficiently acknowledge in him. Though, it must also be acknowledged, his astuteness had a certain short-sighted aspect to it. He did not always see the slightly larger picture. He

may well have calculated, almost certainly would have, that for me to review *Meanjin* with the acerbity of youth would effectively exclude me from its pages for the future. What he failed to calculate was that he, too, would as a consequence be excluded. The Melbourne literary world was not without its paranoia: its members knew the editorial strategies by which editors select reviewers. They knew there was no such thing as a free hand; or rather, the hands might well be free, but the decisions about which free hands to employ would have been calculated, the workers would have had to be worthy of their hire, and the hirers would have known their business. So Joe, no less than I, found himself excluded from the pages of *Meanjin* for the next few decades. While not long afterwards Joe was removed from his editorial chair, on the grounds that under his direction the journal had lost its original focus, had become too literary. And not long after that it ceased publication altogether.

FRIDAY WAS THE big night at the Newcastle, but there were always people drinking there on a Thursday, preparing for Friday, and on a Wednesday, making an early start on the weekend, and on a Monday too, recovering from Sundays which in those days allowed no public drinking. Tuesday is traditionally the day no-one goes anywhere much, restaurants do little business, so the Newcastle was the only place to go on a Tuesday, and you could be sure of finding somebody there you knew. There was always someone to drink with at the Newcastle. It had a reliability that nothing else has ever replaced. You might not be sure of always finding whatever you wanted, but there would always be somebody there. And generally Joe.

After drinking for three hours it was the habit to go off somewhere to eat, to hail a taxi and take off whoever you wanted to eat with and evade whoever you wanted to avoid, waiting till they had gone to the bar or the urinal and then dodging away. Joe and I would often eat together, sometimes in a crowd, sometimes exclusively, avoiding some undesired company. The poet Placket was undesired. He sought us out, but only to be scathing about our

fictions and to aggrandise his own achievements, unlikely accounts of world-wide acceptances, alliances, kinships of poeticism. He would talk in a loud, mannered, penetrating voice, slowly, painfully, not very wittily. For all my belief in the fraternity of the creative, I accepted Joe's refusal of his company without question. But he pursued us. We sat one evening in the Greeks, overlooking Hyde Park, not in the privileged window seats where the *Bulletin* editorial staff held forth, but close; we were rising in status. We had our bottle of Demestica and our taramosalata and our tzatziki and were awaiting our main course when a voice called out our names, a loud, measured, honeyed, elocuted, theatrical voice, the voice of the poet Placket. "Call yourselves writers," it went on, "you couldn't write yourselves out of a paper bag." It was short on wit, but loud. "You think you're editors. You couldn't edit a tram ticket," it added. The trams had long since ceased to run and the tram terminal site had transmuted into the opera house, complete without car park. Urban planning. At least he hadn't called us architects. He sat there at one of the tables at the back, bar stool beside him, beaming in manic satisfaction. "You think you're too good for me, is that it? But I can find you. I can follow you to the ends of the earth."

Joe was ashen. "Oh no, oh no," he kept repeating, "not this." I thought he too was acting. But he was appalled at the invasion. My own reaction was more ambiguous. This, I thought, was the literary life. Recognition at last, even if in denunciation. But to Joe it was a sacrilege. Our names called out, for ever to be associated by the waiters and the *Bulletin* writers with madness, disruption, poetry.

THE *BULLETIN* WRITERS were probably not there. They generally met at lunch, sitting in the window seat, the starched napkins tucked into their shirt collars. Seventy years earlier the *Bulletin* had had a fine literary reputation. Now it was transmuting into a business and finance magazine. But it was a part of the myth of the city. Joe still aspired to it. And succeeded. I had been there, done that, and been dropped. For a couple of years I had reviewed books for it regularly. And then my patron had taken leave, a mistake in

the world of journalism as in the university, and on return found he no longer controlled the books pages. A new books editor brought in a new team and I was not on it. I was not especially distressed. Joe, like many other writers, was smart enough not to review books. It was one of the many things about him of which I disapproved: he expected his own work to be reviewed, and favourably, but did not reciprocate. It was a wise choice. He avoided giving offence to other writers. He avoided displaying any inadequacies of taste or perception or analytic method. His refusal to review gave me offence but no other writers seemed to notice. No-one remarked on it. His successful calculations in this gave me offence too. But that was Joe. No wonder he provoked the poet Placket to shout at him. At us.

So my days with the *Bulletin* were over, Joe's yet to come. Though soon. He aspired to a column, and he achieved it, and soon was sitting with the *Bulletin* editors at the window, gazing reflectively at the war memorial, his napkin tucked in above his tie.

"I used to watch you," said Angelo, my publisher, my former publisher – as with the *Bulletin* I had my moment with Anguish and Robbery and then was dropped from their list. "I would see you and Joe eating there and I would think how I would like to be there with you, to be sharing in literary conversation, to have been accepted as a writer."

Angelo, against the back wall, slowly assembling his first book of stories, reaching from the undefined shadows to the literary life, watching us sitting there in the middle rows as we in turn watched the *Bulletin* editorial writers in their window seat in their success, loud, confident, resplendent in their achieved glory, their momentary splendour, before, inexorably, inevitably, they were sacked and replaced by the legendary Sir Frank, the owner, whom we never saw.

NEAR CENTRAL RAILWAY was a great barn of an eating place, the Italian Club, or, perhaps, more correctly, the Italo-Australian Club. This, like the Greeks, was reached by a lift or a staircase. The restaurant was in a huge hall, used at other times for dances or meetings or social events, or so it appeared. The

restaurant tables and chairs occupied only a small part of it. The rest as I remember was empty floor, perhaps partitioned off. There was an air of the temporary, the improvised, in eating there which Joe, naturally, did not appreciate. But I felt at ease in its ad hoc environment, perhaps because I still felt ill at ease in restaurant formality. And it evoked some memory of eating somewhere in Italy, some similarly improvised or sprawling eatery. The food was not especially good, but it had a predictable reliability, minestrone, lasagna, gnocchi, green beans cooked with onion and potatoes with a touch of oil. The waiters were utterly without pretension. They wore waiters' black trousers and white shirts; at least that survived from the old world. But they were free of the awful theatricality and supercilious intrusiveness that was later to develop as Sydney entered the age of eating out and the nouvelle.

Yet on one occasion that Joe and I lunched there the waiters were effusive, bowing, scraping, ingratiating it seemed at the time. It struck even Joe, who had begun to appreciate respect, as overdone, as approaching the parodic. We were eating there because it was a public holiday and our other haunts were closed. Anzac Day, that celebration of defeat, Australia's Kosovo, the baptism of blood in the initiation of nationhood, the anniversary of the slaughter of Gallipoli. Its significance at this time was in transition. For decades it had been a symbol of the noble sacrifice of Empire, the expression of the colony's loyalty to its British sovereignty. Now, three score and ten years after Federation, nationalism was expressing itself. Now it was to become a symbol of resentment, the cynical butchery of Australian manhood, boyhood, by their exploitative British masters.

"That, of course, is a nonsense," I expounded to Joe.

He glowered at me blankly, toying with his spinach and veal, young calf cut down in its prime.

"It's another case of nationalism being used to obscure a class analysis."

He chewed.

"There were far more British troops killed than Australians. Eight thousand Australians, and forty

thousand British. It wasn't a sacrifice of colonials. It was a sacrifice of rank-and-file by incompetent ruling-class generals."

"How can it have been both a deliberate sacrifice and incompetence?" Joe asked. "Make up your mind."

My mind was made up. I favoured the class-war interpretation.

The waiter came up and asked how our meal was, was it satisfactory, how were we, what more could he do for us.

"Weren't the Italians on the British side in the First World War?" I asked Joe.

"The British side?" said Joe. "Or the allies?"

"Perhaps he's Turkish," I speculated. "Perhaps he's conflating it with the Second World War."

Was it friendly solidarity as an ally, acknowledging sacrifice at the hands of the enemy; or a mocking parody of servility, taunting at defeat?

"Normally they leave you alone," I said.

"And you like that," said Joe. "You get your own knife and fork from the cutlery box and ladle out your potatoes and gravy from the servery. Is that your preferred way? It reminds you of your English college?"

His irritation seemed in excess of the occasion. But nationalism was always a tricky topic.

The waiter reappeared.

"Signor," he began.

"Coffee and the bill," Joe snapped.

We sat in silence, alone. The restaurant was deserted. We might have been the only customers. Perhaps the waiter had merely been glad to have someone there.

"Even as you sit here," said Joe, "that girl is aborting her child."

I could think of nothing to say. His statement had been delivered quite without preparation. There had been no establishment of tone, of mood. No context. No indication of the response expected.

Whenever I suggested the Italian Club later, Joe refused. I don't think he ever ate there again.

THE JOURNALISTS' CLUB on the other side of Central Railway was somewhere you could drink all night. I

never did spend all night there, nor do I think did Joe. But we drank there when the pubs had shut and we wanted the evening to continue. I only ever went there with Joe, since you needed to be signed in by a member, if you were not a member, and I was not. This was a matter of continual comment by Joe. "I cannot understand why you are not a member." I offered various explanations. "I am not a journalist," I would sometimes say. "You do not need to be a journalist." That was true. Rarely did we see a journalist there on our nocturnal expeditions, hoping to spot some likely patron to advance our careers. The truth was you had to be nominated for membership, you could not just apply. "We will nominate you," said Joe. "It will be a gift for Christmas." It was variously promised for Christmas, Easter, my birthday, St Valentine's Day, but it never happened. Perhaps I showed insufficient enthusiasm. It was a cheerless, soulless building, with a squalid utilitarian bar of 1950s style, and it offered no amenities that I could perceive except after-hours drinking. I was drinking quite enough within hours. But Joe loved it as his own, or at least purported to. I do not think that this was because he had been a journalist. He was consistently unromantic and unenthusiastic about his journalist days, or about any employment. I do not think he had found fulfilment in that role, although he was always proposing to visit some war to be a war correspondent. Maybe not posted to the front but safely in the bars of Saigon with other international adventurers. That, anyway, was future projection. About his previous experiences he said little.

We would sit there in the ugly surrounds on the ugly furniture waiting for excitement to come to us and kick the evening along. It never did. Rarely indeed did we meet anyone there. These were generally lugubrious evenings, pouring down middy after middy of not especially appetising beer. The restaurant was always closed. There were framed front pages of old newspapers and honour boards on the wall. The poet of our city, Slessor, was rumoured to

preside here, tossing salads, no longer writing poems. He had not written poems, or at least not published any, for twenty or more years. Instead he wrote hair-raisingly reactionary editorials for the hair-raisingly reactionary *Daily Telegraph*. Though since it was a tabloid that I never read, I repeat this only on hearsay. Similarly the salad-tossing bit. That was something Joe told me, a cameo he clearly treasured, repeating it more than once. It appealed to him, and I predicted in the silence of my heart, and probably enunciated in irritable or careless drunkenness in the tedium of the club, that I could see Joe fulfilling that very role in the fullness of time; Joe tossing salads and being pernicky about the table arrangements and placements, presiding over rather seedy, unappetising lunches and dinners, and writing no more. Like most of my predictions, it has not come true. Joe still writes, if only a little. And I doubt that in his high-table dinners in damp, chilly Cambridge he as yet presides. I should not have told him my prediction. But then, would I have wanted him not to write? Not really. It was never his writing I found disagreeable or disagreed with. Much else I found disagreeable about him, primarily in those days his not writing enough. "And what is enough?" he would ask. "What constitutes sufficient Stakhanovite production in the collective farm of the commissar of creativity? Are we to write to order? Plant now, reap now? You would deny us the freedom of the body as well as the freedom of the imagination. What about *volupté*?" It was his new word, which he pronounced in a vulpine, rather Slavic way, devoid of any of the expected sinuousness and sensuality of its Romance roots. "What about it? Tell me," I would say as we sat in the Journalists' Club at three in the morning, no *volupté* in sight or likely to appear, but the atmosphere of the hair-raisingly reactionary all around us.

There is not much to recall for all those hours we spent there. But it was another of the myths of the city, like its presiding poet.

VALE, SHELTON LEA

I LAMENT THE DEATH of Shelton Lea. He deserves a poetic eulogy, and I wonder who'll write one up to his deserving. I heard about Shelton's death three days after the event, and the news rocked me. We became compadres, as he might have said, from the time we encountered each other in 1965 in the Royal George Hotel in Sussex Street, Sydney, two blocks away from where I worked in a publisher's office in Clarence Street. He introduced me to a world that I inhabited only in mind: a bohemia where everything that was anathema to the privately educated, square world we emerged from had its home.

I occupied a series of fly-by-night tenements in alleys and main streets of the Cross and lived, like Shelton, a step away from the vagrancy laws then in operation in New South Wales. We drank and talked in the George of poetry and jazz, and talked in the streets of the Cross, where he and his brother Bretton kept a stately distance from the straights and squares who came to visit at weekends – the suburban night-trippers who sought drugs, sex from the ladies of the night, and quasi-sex from the strippers who saw them coming. Shelton and I joked that we were 'gentlemen of the road, just like the women who were ladies of the night'. Shelton knew the gambling haunts of the bent coppers, the fly-by-night café-owners like the bigamously married Black Cat proprietor, the coppers' narks, the spivs, the hoons, the gunmen, the speed freaks and the backyard manufacturers of lysergic acid, who became our friends or desperates-in-common.



Shelton at La Mama, 1989, courtesy of Michael Sharkey

I owe a lot to Shelton, who was even then called Shelly – partly derived from his name and partly from his self-declared profession as poet, when he wasn't pulling off spectacular raids as a cat-burglar of select high-rise apartments and elegant dwellings of the Eastern suburbs bourgeoisie. Shelton brought his girlfriends to my flat in Bayswater Road: he befriended refugees from suburban uncoolness at the Cross – including a lovely woman called Jaimey. When Jaimey was told by her landlord that she could not keep a cat in her apartment, she put the weight on Shelton, who took the unfortunate feline to a vet along Bayswater Road to be put down – one of the most traumatic episodes of his time in the Cross. He wrote a poem for Jaimey, and brought flowers to her every day, to soothe the passing of her pet, aware that nothing ever compensates for such loss. I like to think he just went down the road and released the cat in some back block: it would be Shelly all over. Shelton didn't have to try to be the friend of grief-stricken people. He achieved this with such sympathy and grace as I have rarely seen. There was no thought in his mind that he might profit or score from such concern for others' grief. Shelton was gold standard when it came to friendship. If he won hearts, it was through his love for people, a love that had no end through the forty-odd years that I have known him. Someone has to say these things.

Here, I interpolate some vignettes: Shelton, dancing in sunlight through Hyde Park with a girlfriend called Dawn, both of them in exultant spirits;

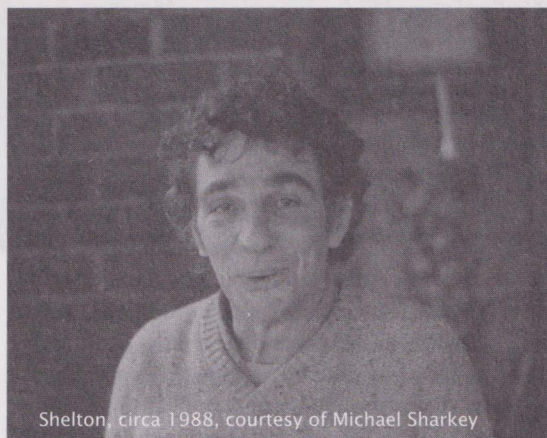
Shelton jumping onto the wall of the Archibald Fountain and into the water, and declaiming poetry; Shelton in uproarious conversation with Sandor Berger outside the Bar Coluzzi in Darlinghurst Road, and egging on Sandor's recital of poems against psychiatry (Sandor was an eccentric Sydney identity, standing in Martin Place with placards fastened front and back to his jacket proclaiming in hand-written block letters, 'Psychiatry is an evil and must be stamped out'); Shelton chanting poems in the El Rocco with a jazz band; Shelton engaging drinkers in conversation in the Royal George while his girlfriend fastened onto the old Push clientele, and newcomers like me, to cadge the copper pennies and thrippences that came across the counter as change; I got pissed off with some of her less engaging pals, who'd sidle up and say "You won't miss this", but I couldn't be angry with Shelton's girl – she and Shelton were so good-natured, and we simply had to share whatever we had; Shelton, asking if he could borrow my floor for the night to entertain another lonely terrific girl whom he'd claimed had no place to stay, and my agreement to move down the road a few doors to stay at Doug Pilgrim's place while Shelton consoled his new friend. Shelton had the least sense of imposition, the surest sense that people would see a charitable act required doing and would do it. I think he had the least malicious intentions of anyone I've met. His self-deprecation was boundless, his awareness that he was putting on an act so surely judged ("How was I, brudder?"; "Could you believe that?") that it was impossible to begrudge him anything.

Above all, Shelly had the best sense of his own role-playing, the most inclusive sense of humour of all the people I'd met who called themselves artists. There were plenty of contenders: Lindsey Bourke, so fixated on insisting that everyone must be creative; Harvey Brookes, the guitarist who sat playing with his long arse-length hair interrogating each new arrival at the Cross to the extent that everyone believed he was a coppers' nark; Brubeck, the world-weary jazz aficionado and beret-wearing cool dude from Greenknowe Avenue whom everyone stood in awe of for his poise and cool detachment; the ex-German Army Swiss deserters who inhabited the Kings Cross RSL and bragged about having survived hard labour in Swiss prisons after the war; the old sailor who had the best dope in Darlinghurst, but who graciously warned people who wanted to shoot up

heavier drugs that they'd better not make a mess in his kitchen; Black Alan, who shared Christmas dinner with me and his girlfriend in a cold-water apartment in Woolloomooloo. None of these had the personality and grace (a word later debased into the buzz-word 'charisma') that Shelton possessed right to the end. Some of them were interested in people as fellow travellers pausing in a demimonde balanced between great days in the past and some ill-defined future glory; some were talented and interesting and had the knack of living frugally alone or off others down to a fine art, and some were out and out mongrels. Shelton was finer than that: when he struck a pose, it was as a lover of women, poetry and friends – and he was playing himself, because at heart, those affections were genuine. When he put on his 'villain' act, he couldn't keep a straight face.

Shelton walked the streets of the Cross with his girl Wendy, pushing a pram containing their infant daughter Chaos (later changed to 'Kay') lying on a mattress that covered a fantasy stash of drugs. I ran into him doing the rounds, as I ran into his brother Bretton, magnificent with an avant-garde (for those times) Mohawk haircut, set off by elegant clothes; he was also interested in practical applications of chemistry. Shelton paid his dues to society in many ways, and proved himself, to me at least, a real pal to his outlaw brother. This occurred before the Vietnam cockup, when the streets of the Cross were a sprawl of American and other soldiers on R and R. Shelly and I knew the streets were mean even before they became the anterooms to further sleaze: some of the gambling dives were chockablock with thuggish cops, like Bumper Farrell, whose reputation for turncoat behaviour was legendary. Farrell hunted vagrants (and anyone he didn't like the look of, myself included) to boost the score of arrests at Paddington Police Station, while turning a blind eye to grander villainy. A companion at the publisher's warehouse I then worked in recalled Farrell as a footballer who had in his younger days been famous for biting the ear off a rival football player; he had also reneged on his Labor background to become a stalwart of the evil empire of Liberal Premier Norm Askin (of later 'Drive over the bastards' fame during anti-Vietnam demonstrations). Shelton was on his way to Melbourne by then, where he published in the Melbourne Surrealist poetry publication *Outlaw* with Joel Ellenberg and Walter Billeter, and where he met Barrett Reid and the *Overland* writers.

The last time I saw Shelly in Sydney, he was on the eve of leaving, when he told me he would be gone for a while. It was a hell of a long while, and before I moved to Melbourne nearly twenty years later, we had the most desultory contact: word of mouth, occasional encounters, a parcel of publications. I followed his career, collected the flimsy broadsheets and the surrealist magazines, heard and read about the extraordinary sectarian turf wars that made up Melbourne poetry. When we met in Melbourne in the 1980s, Shelly loudly advertised our acquaintance and introduced me to a brilliant lot of people; he was a visitor in every poetry tribe except for those he regarded as frauds, and some pompous



Shelton, circa 1988, courtesy of Michael Sharkey

Shelton encouraged others, who were often first-timers, from the sidelines, calling out “Tell it to them” and “Beautiful”. Young and old poets thrived in that atmosphere.

ones in the academies. I worked part-time in one of the academies – Footscray Institute of Technology, but that was light years from Melbourne and Monash, and I lived at North Melbourne next to the mills and railway and opposite the brothels and warehouses. Shelton visited my partner Winifred Belmont and me, and stayed over at our Dryburgh Street cottage at times. On one occasion, he woke on a public holiday morning with a terrible thirst, and we set off in search of an oasis. We walked for miles around a ghost city; the trams were running on Sabbath timetables, and every pub was shut as a miser’s purse in Bob-a-Job week. After a couple of hours, we found an early opener that was open, down on the Bay, crammed full of extras from an Antipodean version of a Fellini movie – refugees from a Bachelor and Spinster’s Ball, dressed in ruined evening clothes; smashed derros and ‘parkie darkies’ who had the price of a couple of heart-starters; railway workers and cleaners breaking on morning shifts; punters stuck in town who’d missed the last train the night before; gay girls and sailors, and wide-boys and schoolboys, businessmen and city gents refusing to break with a lifetime of early limbering-up drinks. It was a glorious sight and Shelly was in heaven.

Later, when I had got to know Barrett Reid, he asked Winifred and me to help with the proofreading of *Overland*, and we joined him and Shelton at Bar-

rie’s place at Heide, taking turns to read aloud and check the stories, articles, reviews and poems. There was engaging and often hilarious or entertainingly clever commentary on the contributors, especially when we paused for elegant lunches and Barrett and Shelton fired up each other with anecdotes about people who were legends to us. Shelton and Winifred chicked each other, both aware that they were artists in different ways. When Winifred and I moved to North Carlton in 1988, I interviewed Shelton for *Southerly* magazine, and Winifred found a choice gift for Shelton to give to his daughter for her twenty-first birthday. (The interview appeared in the fourth issue for 1989.)

The charm of Shelton is what I hold close. We resumed conversation after absences of days, weeks, or years as if we’d never stopped talking. He knew the core in the Melbourne poetry scene – at the Hawke Hotel, the Provincial, the Dan O’Connell pub, where he was one of the star performers. Shelton was often the presiding genius, always starting a new performance venue when publicans decided that poets weren’t spending enough money. I owned a few books and fugitive publications by Shelton that had become collectors’ treasures, and Shelton was an avid collector of rarities on his own account having become a friend and confidant of Barrett Reid. I was amazed to find myself in Barrett’s house, where the front study was crammed with floor-to-ceiling

shelves bearing a treasury of choice books: European novelists and playwrights and poets, English, American and Australian and South American and Asian and African ditto; it was a wonderful library. Elsewhere, the house held long work benches, shelves, and stacks of magazines and books piled up for review in *Overland*. Australian painters' works hung from every vacant wall space – paintings that summed up the history of Heide's occupants during their heyday. Outside, Barrett kept a splendid garden, including a section set off for herbs and another dedicated to the oldest types of rose bushes; Barrett thought the examples he had there were accurate exemplars of the types Shakespeare would have had in mind in the history plays.

Shelton helped with gardening, had a real affection for the house and its occupant. When Barrett died, I had left Melbourne, and I flew to Melbourne to condole with Shelton, who had seen Barrett through his last days. I spent a couple of days at Heide with Shelton before the funeral, and I didn't envy him the task of organising Barrett's affairs. Now, I don't envy the lot of those who have to organise Shelton's.

When Shelton walked into a poetry reading, the audience often heard a terrific new poem, or at the least as it now seems to me, were privileged to hear him read some of his perennially outstanding poems. Shelton encouraged others, who were often first-timers, from the sidelines, calling out "Tell it to them" and "Beautiful". Young and old poets thrived in that atmosphere. And Shelton was just as likely to turn up next day and tell me that he'd spent the night with the 'parkie darkies' in the Fitzroy Gardens. Who could disbelieve him? He shared himself around. He had the gift of friendship for all new poets and people he once called 'travellers', who, like myself, had warmed to him from the moment we met. He invited us to Mountain View, where he lived with Chrissie Webb, the beautiful white witch and simpler with whom he hosted Eric Beach's wonderful fortieth birthday party.

I imagine his final days with Leith like that: the company of a beautiful companion, surrounded by friends who admired and loved him, expressing by their presence their unbounded sense of gratitude for the gift of their convergence with Shelton's life. I missed his last reading. In September 2004, he came to hear me, Tony Bennett, Julian Croft (three New England admirers of Shelton) and Lauren Williams

(home-grown Melbourne admirer of Shelton) read at Kris Hemensley's shop in Melbourne, and he was as usual the encouraging, warm friend I have always known. I hope my reading lived up to his standard. (His own talent as a reader was outstanding: eloquent, singing, commanding attention.) I missed his final book launch, but I think it must have been one of the great readings of his career. From all accounts it sounds like one of the most affecting.

Back in 1988, Shelton spoke in the interview about his desire to get the Nebuchadnezzar poems finished. It's astonishing to think that it took seventeen years for him to do that. In the meantime, Shelton spread himself and his poems around like a spendthrift. When I think of Shelton, and his poetry, I am devastated by what we have lost. Shelton spoke of narrative as the core of poetry; I know his narratives, like 'the peach melba hat' so well that I think of Drouin races and Melbourne tram rides whenever it comes to mind. But there was something else – the love of women and life gathered into lyric lines like the ones in the 'palatine madonna', that showed Shelton for the clever master of balladry and song that he was. Now, I cannot help but think that Byron's last words would do for a memorial that Shelton might have, but was too modest to claim: "I leave something of beauty in the world".

Michael Sharkey has published several collections of poems; the most recent (in 2002) is *History: Selected Poems 1978–2000*. A new collection will appear in 2006.

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SHELTON LEA 1946–2005

“WHEN I WAS wide-eyed and entering the poetry scene back in the late 1970s it was Shelton . . . who gave me time and encouragement. He was luminous and passionate and a very fine poet.” That email from the poet and novelist Anthony Lawrence was one of many received by Black Pepper after Shelton died eight days after his heroic appearance at his last book launch. It is how many remember him as a poet and as a barracker for poets.

Shelton Lea was born in 1946 in Fitzroy and adopted out into Toorak. He fled from the toffy suburb and Carey Grammar aged 12 and into a troubled youth on the streets and survival by theft. He was in Pentridge C Division by 16. Writing for fellow prisoners became one of the schooling grounds for his art.

He travelled the country and forged his first Aboriginal bonds, leading to his informed championing of their causes, and those of the dispossessed generally, in his work. Psychologically, his adoption made him feel at one with them. His street education gave him his characters and their stories, though it should not be forgotten that he was also well read, hence the range of classical references in his work.

After a stint in Kings Cross in the early sixties, he returned to Melbourne where he was associated with the Heide group of artists and poets. Barrett Reid encouraged his poetry and through Reid Shelton developed an ongoing link with *Overland*.

He published nine collections, the first in 1962, the last in May this year. They are *The Asmodeus Poems* (1962), *Corners In Cans* (1969), *Chrysalis* (1972), *The Paradise Poems* (1973), *Chockablock With Dawn* (1975), *Palatine Madonna* (1979), *Poems From A Peach Melba Hat* (1985), *The Love Poems* (1993) and *Nebuchadnezzar*.

Most of these were published during his influential Melbourne years. During that time he was an instigator and organiser of important poetry readings and an ardent reader himself. He received two Australia Council grants and Arts Victoria funding to read his

works throughout rural Victoria and read in pubs, at festivals, schools, prisons, universities and under trees throughout the land. (I first met him on one such excursion to Adelaide in the early eighties where, at a reading I had organised, he and Eric Beach read on a boat on the Torrens.) His compelling voice, his swagger, that silver-topped cane; in short, his identity as a poet, were at the centre of his charm.

He led a restless life without ever losing his innate commitment to his poetry. Fourteen and a quarter years ago he met Dr Leith Woodgate who became his partner. During those years he established Eaglemont Books which published seven poetry titles, the last being Raffaella Torresan’s photographic essays *Melbourne Poets Live 2003*. He also ran a bookshop by that name until he moved and it became DeHavillands on Wellington, specialising in Australian poetry and collectors’ editions.

Shelton and Black Pepper had for more than eighteen months planned to bring out what was to become his last book. He would never deliver me the manuscript. Two and a half months ago we met by chance in Brunswick Street. Drinking in The Bar With No Name, he told me of his diagnosis with cancer. Gesticulating with his characteristic long joint he was upbeat about the book. The manuscript was about to appear. Leith kept him up to the mark on delivery. That book is dedicated to her. It is his most comprehensive collection, in that it covers most aspects of his life and concerns.

He is survived by Leith, two sons and two daughters from previous relationships. Many friends mourn him.

There are strong and fine poems throughout his collections. He deserves a broad Selected, a task made awkward by the Literature Board underwriting only living authors. As another poet and novelist, Peter Murk remarked: “58! – it’s teenage these days”.

Kevin Pearson is, along with Gail Hannah, publisher at Black Pepper Press. <bpepper@blackpepperpublishing.com>

Hemmed in by Hearsay . . .

Believing only in oneself,
One's relationship to one's own way of living,
Looking at the world from the viewpoint
Of self-imposed physical alienation,
Fixed and essentialist,
Keeping all doubts at large,
Confusing the world
With the look of one's own lounge room,
Comfortable but devoid of most living things . . .
Monotonousness makes mistakes so big
You can't even see them,
With overtones of gross insanity,
Investments in criminality,
Ego-driven stunts!

Locked securely into the Money Market,
Allowing oneself to be churned about
Like butter in a mix-master,
Herded against the wall, hurled into oblivion,
Hastily breaking off all personal commitments,
Becoming one solid mass together,
Packaged and voiceless,
Doomed to live out one's life as anonymous,
Sealed off, enviable and unapproachable,
The cream off the top of the range,
Thick, white opulence,
Too ashamed to share the burden of it all
With anybody else.

Sitting around in one's lounge room,
Thinking one is on top of the world,
Avoiding face to face communication,
Allowing chatter to be idle,
The world one vast spectacle of inanities,
Hearsay and mindless meanderings,
Where the self is equated
With an interminable need for light entertainment,
Artificial stimuli, escapist dreams . . .
Dictating other peoples' realities is a by-product of fear!
Committing robberies of other people's time,
Pirating patience,
Raising the alarm at trivialities is unforgivable!
Not listening to anyone else's point of view
Is slavery to sham aural practices,
Living by impulse alone, a non-communal state.

JELTJE

The News

I have been watching the news
Without sound

The news is: men, really agitated about
A burnt car, then more men with safety vests
Putting out the burnt car with fire hoses

Then there is more men seething in a crowd
A couple of buildings blown to bits
And men in safety vests carrying away a man
On a stretcher,
One woman appears (in a safety vest) and she is crying
A lot, another woman holds her for comfort
This scene doesn't take too long

Back to the men: more revved up guys
Dancing around with banners

Then smooth guys in suits walking in
To a foyer with other guys in suits
Then the boy-guy, George in a suit
In front of an empty fire place making this empathetic
Gesture where his hand is flat on his
Stomach and then goes forward
While he frowns a bit
Then the newsreader guy comes
Back, he looks neutrally unhappy
And serious. That's the news.

It seems to be bad or weird, and just
About men. I am glad not to hear it.
Sorry for all you
Decent men out there but there is no
Good news.

CAROL JENKINS

The Nightingales

In Spring

When the nightingales return from the South
Our home is circled by song.

The Brook

By the house is cleansed by the tune
The grass glistens with dew.

The Forest

Of Linden and Birch,
Bursts into blossom.

During a

Strange and scented wind
The nightingales softly descend.

Our House

Which in autumn grows tight
Swells with the sounds of spring.

The Windows

Deaf and shut during winter
Become ears, wide and open.

The Nightingales

Quieten at midnight, nurturing young
As my dreams yearn for their song.

RAJKO JOVCESKI

TRANS. GEORGE TOSESKI
(FROM THE MACEDONIAN)

Ocean, Croajingalong

A pair of kids found bones, more bones, and skulls'
eye-sockets stared at the beach-pounding ocean.

Adults averted their eyes. Observant children,
we knew what we'd found in the dunes by the ocean.

People with spears here. People with guns.
Before we were born they hunted near this ocean.

Unspoken, in town, our skeletal ancestors.
We whisper the Jew, the Abo, to the ocean.

Fishes-in-water, we swim the estuary.
Our fathers brood on the face of the ocean.

We enter the river. The sand-bar breaks.
The lake takes the boat out to meet the ocean.

A pelican cruises low above the sand-dunes.
Pacific Gulls, a pair, fly south over the ocean.

LORIN FORD

Portrait of Pavel Shalamov, Magadan Labour Camp, Siberia, April 1952

Some of the other prisoners in our work detail
are deliberately slow,
inviting the truncheon,
hoping for a spell in the hospital.

But the guards,
not knowing limits,
deal blow after blow
and four of us are assigned shovels,
the disposal of the corpse.

Rules,
as numerous as winter snowflakes, summer mosquitoes.
Rules,
barked in the rollcall yard,
pinned to a noticeboard,
superseded, ignored
or driven home
by a firing squad.

I who can name every butterfly found west of the Urals,
know how to build a boat,
how to prepare and season a freshly caught rabbit,
here try to go unnoticed,
limbs in a drab uniform,
bent to task,
bent to task,
bringing grey soup to my mouth,
moments of sleep to my body.

Hierarchy of killers,
hierarchy of thieves.
Bread, sex, kitchen spoons filed down to stabbing point,
these are the currencies here.

I watch,
learn who can help, who can hinder,
who should be avoided or flattered,
waiting for a turn in the weather,
for Stalin to die.

PETER BAKOWSKI

America (*or*, What I Bought)

I walked across
America, buying everything:
I ambled through twenty
Chinatowns, eight Little
Italys & one Soho: I snaked
through Roseburg & Crescent City & Sheboygan & Cadillac, Michigan:
I dropped fistfuls of quarters
(& dimes & nickels & pennies) over
Marion & Dodge City &
Amarillo & Mobile,

made it with greenbacks in
Eureka, Utah & Yonkers & Augusta
& Lake Havasu City & Rexburg
& places that don't need punctuating
Escondido Durango Laramie Rapid City
Bismarck Saginaw Bowling Green
Knoxville Macon Sarasota Biloxi:

and I felt motion
rolling though me, the dollars spilled
out of me, clunking steadily
like a slot-machine;

and I made a mountain
of my possessions: swinging Elvis wall-clocks & Amish bird-
houses & rust-spotted
binoculars & decks of girlie playing-cards & Confederate
flag bumper-stickers & taxidermied
raccoons & I Stand With Nixon pins & pink plastic yard
flamingos & used
coffins & Tucson cactus shot-glasses & meat-hooks & ham
radios & second-hand cardigans & cisterns & trash cans & truck-
beds & science-fair trophies & AK-47s & miniature
Washington Monuments & psychotropic drugs & love-
heart barrettes & back-
issues of *Time* magazine & beat-poetry & partnerless
gloves & high-school mascot suits & rabbit-
paw keyrings & John Wayne
videos & tongueless
shoes that flapped
pointlessly,

and I sat there, on my
pile of glorious currency,
I made pilgrimages to the malls
of the mid-west, wearing a deerhunter
& Levis & cowboy boots,

I lived on
HoHos
& Almond Joys
& Mr. Goodbars & Ritz Bits
& Hostess Snoballs & Twinkies & Ding-
Dongs & Cheez Whiz & Coke & Pay-
Days & Reece's Peanut Butter Cups & Cheddar
Goldfish & Heath Bars & Graham Crackers & Cool-
Ranch Fritos & Baby Ruths & Doritos & Pixie
Stix & Mountain Dew & Lays & Funyuns & Junior
Mints & Krispy Kremes & Velveeta & Minute
Maid Orangeade & Dum-Dum Pops & Kraft Singles & Chef
Boyardee's Ravioli & Jell-o & Oscar Mayer
Wieners & Jalapeño Poppers & Peppermint
Patties & Raisinets & Cheese Nips & Hershey's
Kisses:

I counted my change, I crumpled
my receipts: they trailed
all the way behind me, looped over
junkyards & caryards & garage sales &
closeouts & outlets & sample sales & promotional
booths & neighbourhood stores & gas stations & fast-
food joints & lemonade stands & suburban
malls & flagship stores & boutiques & department
stores & chains & hock stores & consignment stores & surplus
warehouses & supermarkets,

and I was at one with myself,
I stood outside myself,
I looked at what I had bought
& felt at peace
& remembered the prosaic sheen
of the countless windows,
glowing, glowing,

so I wrote it
down for you in
a poem (nothing
post-modern), you
see, there's more
to life than
just
being, my dear.

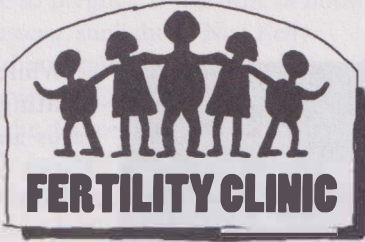
S.J. HOLLAND-BATT

Old and Young

If he had come earlier
your father might have painted great landscapes of the bush.
As it was he made several pencil sketches
of the birches he had planted in a thick clump
in the backyard of a poor suburban house
in the west where the natural vegetation was a particular grass
with roots like the fingers of a strangler.
If he had come earlier
he might have seen things differently
and he might have made his way more comfortably
in this new world.
As it was he stayed as thin and hesitant
as the weakest birch in the embattled clump
and faded in the hot winds to a colour close to parchment
absorbing every new humiliation
fraying at the edges
and tearing at himself for past wrongs
you can only guess at.
If he had come as a younger man
he would have missed the battlefields
and he would have come as an artist
not as a soldier and a prisoner and a refugee
and he might have been regarded differently.
But he came too late to make an impression
and too late to comprehend
how his children might see things
in another light.

OLGA PAVLINOVA OLENICH

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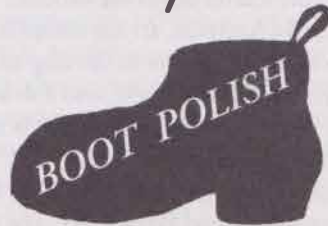
Ashville



Bald Knob, NSW



Cryon



Blackall



Aireys Inlet



Barkly Down

EXPRESSIONISM IN AUSTRALIA

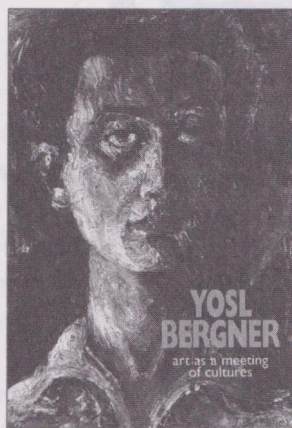
Frank Klepner: *Yosl Bergner: Art as a meeting of cultures* (Macmillan Education Australia, \$66)

This book is an important contribution to a better understanding of twentieth-century art in Australia, and we are all much in debt to Frank Klepner for writing it. He makes a convincing case that Yosl Bergner was the founding father of Expressionist painting in this country. This is of great importance because it was through Expressionism that art here attained its highest achievements during the Second World War.

The key to the matter lies in the subtitle, ‘a meeting of cultures’. In Australia, art has always been torn between two ideals: the desire to develop an art that differs from the rest of the world, and a desire to be a part of the world’s art; between, that is to say, a national and a universal vision.

This conflict expressed itself forcibly in Melbourne during the Second World War. The national desire to express difference had long been present in landscape painting, which has always been the most popular kind of painting in this country. But the impact, beginning in the later 1930s, of Modernism or what I prefer now to call the Formalesque, set up a major challenge to landscape’s dominance. Modernism, the Formalesque, was a universalising style. It defied national boundaries. By 1950 it had spread worldwide.

It was the young Sidney Nolan who gave the Formalesque a national identity, first in his wartime Wimmera landscapes and then in his famous Ned Kelly series of 1947. Nolan gave the style a local home, and a local hero in Ned Kelly. He summed up his achievement, brilliantly, by the phrase “Rousseau and sunlight”, in other words a faux-naïf, primitivistic style that well served the ideals of nationalism. He reinforced and modernised the colonial Kelly but like the myth itself, Nolan’s was a kind of one-man stand. His style was his own, and had no significant followers, and after 1950 he spent most of his life abroad.



While Nolan was painting his ‘Rousseaus and sunlights’ Hitler was gassing millions of Jews, gypsies, communists and homosexuals in extermination camps. For artists worldwide, the situation raised the old chestnut once again: is art autonomous, best developed through its own dynamics, or is it

inseparably linked to the social and moral concerns of our daily lives?

Yosl Bergner arrived in Melbourne in 1937 aged 17. He possessed a charming personality, made friends quickly, and also enchanted his new-found friends with the power of his moral conviction as the wartime crisis loomed larger. The Australian landscape did not interest him. As Janine Burke has aptly put it, “he re-invented the city for Melbourne’s young painters”. And he did more than that.

In the second chapter, Frank Klepner discusses Jewish art and its binding links with humanism. He tells us how Yosl always introduced himself with the words, “I am Yosl Bergner, a Jewish painter from Poland”. He identified his own art with the Jewish painters of the *Ecole de Paris*, who were largely Eastern European, the best known being Chaim Soutine. Klepner discusses Yosl’s relationship with the Jewish Bund, the Yiddish language and with such writers as Franz Kafka, a Czech Jew. Yosl arrived in Melbourne as an enchanting, exotic stranger who brought with him an unparalleled crisis. He brought it to a group of young Australians, artists whose destiny it was to define the mood and moral relevance of art during the war: Albert Tucker, Arthur Boyd, Noel Counihan, John Perceval and Victor O’Connor. His influence was crucial in the development of the art of all of them.

Call it Social Realism or call it Expressionism, the distinction depends upon the degree of stridency in the political content of the art. Stylistically, it is

the same kind of art, functioning at different levels for differing personal reasons. But the central point Klepner makes is that the emergence of the style itself was due to Bergner. It had little or nothing to do with Rousseau, sunlight or Ned Kelly.

It's true that a case has been made for Danila Vassileff, a migrant Cossack. But Danila's art did not exercise the degree of influence that Yosl's did. It was largely inspired by the naïve primitivism of child art, and his magnificent sculpture in Lilydale limestone, by far his greatest achievement, has little if anything to do with Expressionism.

It all turns on the question: who introduced Expressionism to Melbourne? Klepner claims it was Bergner. I find his case convincing.

The second major point that Klepner develops in the book is Yosl Bergner's relationship to Australia's Indigenous peoples. A chapter entitled 'Aborigines and Jews' traces, briefly but effectively, the depiction of 'blacks' by 'whites' since the beginnings of European settlement. Klepner stresses that "Bergner was not concerned . . . with Aboriginal art forms . . . It was for him strictly a matter of rapprochement with the human, social conditions of the mostly urban Aborigines whether full blood or half caste". Since his "universalising depiction of injustices perpetrated were directed at a European audience, any facile or spurious inclusion of motifs or totems would have been out of place. These

were not anthropological curiosities but fellow human beings. Bergner's vision was new in its special empathy". Klepner then discusses the relationship of Bergner's Aboriginal paintings to the work of John Perceval, Arthur Boyd, Noel Counihan and James Wigley.

If you should visit the Australian Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria at Federation Square you will find there, if you are patient, but one small painting by Yosl Bergner. It's called *House Backs, Parkville*, in the Joseph Brown Collection, and was painted about a year after Yosl arrived. There is nothing in the collection that indicates that he introduced Expressionist painting to Australia or was the first person to paint Aboriginal people as human beings, not as curiosities.

In other words Bergner's art has been marginalised and is now largely ignored while the works of those he deeply influenced now exchange hands in the auction house for huge amounts of money. Perhaps it's time the National Gallery of Victoria began to plan an exhibition of wartime Expressionism in Australia and paid honour to the young migrant who brought it to our shores.

Meanwhile, we have Klepner's ground-breaking book to remind us of a neglected chapter in our history.

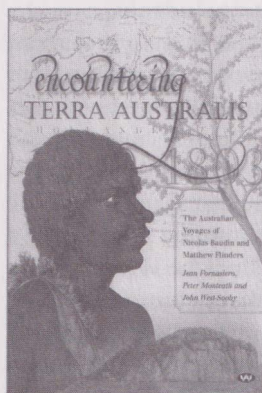
Bernard Smith is, among other things, an art historian.

DISCOVERY AND ENCOUNTER

ANTONI JACH

Jean Fornasiero, Peter Monteath and John West-Sooby: *Encountering Terra Australis: The Australian Voyages of Nicolas Baudin and Matthew Flinders* (Wakefield Press, \$49.95)

The French expedition to New Holland (1800–1804) – commissioned by Napoleon Bonaparte and under the command of Nicolas Baudin – used to be one of the great lesser-known stories of Australian history. Prior to the release of a range of recent studies, those interested in the French exploration of Australia would have turned to Christine Cornell's translation of the *Journal of Nicolas Baudin* published in 1974 by the Libraries Board of South Australia, or they may have come across Frank Horner's *The French*



Reconnaissance: Baudin in Australia 1801–1803.

But now, all of a sudden, the story of the Baudin expedition is becoming much better known with the publication of a number of excellent books in recent years. Some of these, along with the admirable book under review, include

Anthony J. Brown's *Ill-Starred Captains: Matthew Flinders and Nicolas Baudin, The Encounter 1802: Art of the Flinders and Baudin Voyages* edited by Sarah Thomas, *The Navigators: Flinders vs Baudin, the race between Matthew Flinders and Nicolas Baudin to discover the fabled passage through the middle of Australia* by Klaus Toft, and the recent translation by

Christine Cornell of volume two of François Péron's *Voyage of Discovery to the Southern Lands*. Additionally the *Australian Journal of French Studies* has published a marvelous edition (volume no. 2, 2004) entitled 'The Baudin Expedition 1800–1804'.

Many of these books would, no doubt, have been spurred into publication by the bicentenary of the meeting of the two navigators, Baudin and Flinders, on 8 April 1802 in Encounter Bay. It is fortunate for scholars and general readers alike that the encounter took place off the coast of South Australia, encouraging the publishing of these important books by South Australian publishers such as Wakefield Press, Crawford House Publishing and the Friends of the State Library of SA. If the encounter had taken place off the Victorian or New South Wales coast there may not have been the same rush by publishers in those states to memorialise the encounter.

Why this interest all of a sudden? Apart from the obvious fact of the bicentenary, the stories of Flinders and Baudin are great stories in themselves: full of drama, hope and reversals of all kind. Both narratives star men who were driven to succeed, who would do whatever was required to become the first to discover unknown lands. One could argue that it's a primal instinct – to discover – that most people manage to successfully avoid in favour of a quiet suburban existence. The closest most people will get to discovery is to daydream via the pages of a book like *Encountering Terra Australis*.

We could say in one sense that both commanders, from a quotidian point of view, were mad in their own way. Flinders sets out in a leaky boat with rotting timbers because that's the only boat that can be spared. Baudin is so obsessed with charting the northern part of New Holland that against the advice of his senior officers he sails into the full force of a monsoon (July 1803) and finds he is not making much progress. He finally gives up, turns around and his corvette is blown with ferocious speed around the northern end of New Holland because the monsoon is now blowing behind him. On his homeward voyage to Ile-de-France (Mauritius) Baudin coughs up part of his lungs, places the parts in a jar and shows them to anyone who comes to see him. Flinders is shipwrecked off the coast of Queensland. He takes twelve crew with him in a small boat – a cutter – and they sail to Port Jackson, covering 750 miles in fourteen days.

So these are tales of hardship and determination, which end in personal failure for the principals. Napoleon Bonaparte's alleged summary of Baudin's mission (according to Anthony J. Brown) was the following: "[He] did well to die; on his return I would have had him shot". There were crucial lines missing – the coastline of present-day Victoria and South Australia – from the map of New Holland at the time of the expedition and it was Baudin's task to be the first to chart the coastline and fill in those lines on the map. Apart from a small section of coastline it was a task he was beaten to by James Grant and Matthew Flinders.

Encountering Terra Australis is divided into two parts: the first part recounts the narrative of the intertwining fates of the two expeditions while the second part examines the legacies of both expeditions. The aim in the first part as described in the preface is to "present Baudin's words in parallel with those of Flinders, in order to emphasise the commonality of their experience". The stated aim has been achieved. The effect of the generous number of direct quotations is to bring the personalities of the two commanders to life and to illuminate the difficulties that both expeditions faced.

Encountering Terra Australis provides a very useful service in making parts of the writing of the two commanders accessible to a general public who do not necessarily have access to Baudin's journal and to Flinders' *A Voyage to Terra Australis*.

Additionally, there are numerous high-quality illustrations in the book including thirty-two pages of colour, reproduced from the work of the artists of the two expeditions. The illustrations give a glimpse into the way the artists perceived the complete 'otherness' of the strangely exotic land they were encountering.

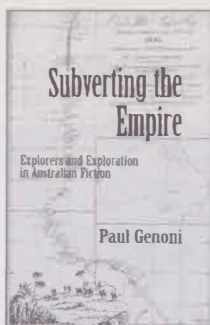
This is a beautifully published book using heavy paper and with a solid binding and it is relatively inexpensive given its high production values. So, all in all, the authors and the publisher are to be congratulated on the publication of another worthy addition to the growing literature on this particular period of discovery and encounter (1800–1804), which is one of the most fascinating in the whole of Australian history.

Antoni Jach's new novel is scheduled to be published by the Giramondo Publishing Company in March 2006. He is a lecturer at RMIT.

REVISITING EMPTINESS

KEVIN RABALAIS

Paul Genoni: *Subverting the Empire: Explorers and Exploration in Australian Fiction* (Common Ground Publishing, \$29.95)



During his exile in Switzerland, Dostoyevsky's creativity began to suffer. Used to the broad steppe of his native Russia, the story goes, he found himself inhibited by the surrounding mountains, claustrophobic inside an unfamiliar landscape. As unreceptive as the Australian inland was to early explorers (two names: Leichhardt, Burke), the landscape has proven to be surprisingly fertile territory for the creative writer. Paul Genoni argues in *Subverting the Empire* that "Literature provided what physical exploration could not yet achieve: an investigation of the heart of the great southern continent", what Patrick White called "the Great Australian Emptiness".

It is the word 'heart' that becomes central throughout Genoni's investigations, for *Subverting the Empire* is as much about coming to terms with the physical landscape as it is about the need for an emotional settling, one which, he reminds us, occurs through a national literature. *Subverting the Empire* is a highly readable book that establishes itself from the beginning as a comfortable blend of academic and popular history, both historical survey and literary criticism. Along with the book's ongoing history of Australian inland exploration, Genoni details the evolution of literature written in and about Australia and provides an insightful focus on the effects that the early exploration stories continue to have on the national imagination. The final section considers ways in which the history, literature and these stories of colonial exploration continue to influence Australian literature. He focuses specifically on the work of three contemporary Australian novelists – Thea Astley, Gerald Murnane and Rodney Hall – using their fiction to highlight the ways in which the explorer figure has evolved as "an unusually rich type from which to further the pursuit of . . . postcolonial culture, the search for a national identity".

The early nineteenth century was an age that allowed, for the first time, amateur access to the natural

sciences, which sparked widespread European interest in following the recording and classification of the natural world of Australia. Much of *Subverting the Empire*, therefore, concerns the significance of the explorers' journals. Treated as government property, the journals could be published and seen at home and abroad – unlike a flag planted in the centre of the continent, say, which would provide little reason for celebration or understanding about any newly claimed spaces.

The effects that the explorers' journals have on the contemporary Australian psyche may have more to do with the ways creative writers later took up those writings. It is through creative recreations that the early explorers continue to permeate the Australian imagination. In presenting a thorough analysis of the ways Astley, Murnane and Hall reinterpret these stories in their fiction, Genoni shows the "myths" through which people learn to comprehend themselves and their environment. What creative writers could offer that explorers and historians couldn't is a landscape of emotional settling: "Attuned to the nuances of postcolonial thought these novelists use the mythic appeal of the explorer figure as a means of representing the search for a personal metaphysic based on the encounter with the alien land."

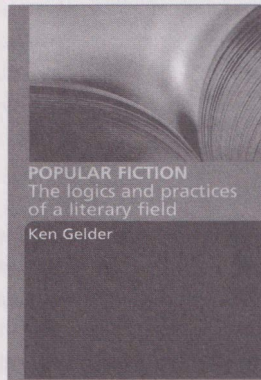
During his tour of Australia in the 1890s, Mark Twain noted that the scrub country provides "the kind of thing which is so useful to the Australian novelist". He cites examples, most involving a heroine lost in the bush and an Aboriginal tracker. You can see where this is going. Twain's jests aside, the Australian novel, as Genoni shows, has proved itself to be a carnivorous monster, one that has had little trouble adapting to the landscape and mining its mysteries and riches to settle various spaces, both emotional and physical.

Kevin Rabalais, an American writer living in Melbourne, is editor of *Novel Voices* (Writer's Digest Books), conversations with award-winning American novelists.

BEYOND THE ACADEMY

JOE GRIXTI

Ken Gelder: *Popular Fiction: The Logics and Practices of a Literary Field* (Routledge, \$49)



The blurb to Ken Gelder's new study of popular fiction includes terms like "accessible and challenging", "theoretically sophisticated", "lively, progressive and comprehensive", "important", "stimulating", "enjoyable", "essential reading" and "groundbreaking". These are high claims indeed for an academic text which sets out to give visibility and definition to a literary field which, among academic circles at least, has traditionally been viewed with varying levels of disdain, suspicion or condescension. The good news is that Gelder's book more than lives up to this high praise. It wears its considerable learning lightly; it reviews and analyses a vast and diverse field in a consistently engaging and thought-provoking fashion; it is meticulously researched; it is also refreshingly and imaginatively original.

For Gelder, the logics and practices of popular fiction are primarily industrial and commercial, and they are intimately tied to the category of entertainment. The sheer scale and diversity of the industry is staggering. To take just one of the eight primary genres of popular fiction identified and discussed in the book, the romance market is now worth over \$1.6 billion a year globally, with romances constituting up to 55 per cent of all paperback sales, and one publisher (Harlequin) selling more than 5.5 romance books a second (160 million worldwide in 2003). Gelder also charts out how each of the different genres of popular fiction (romance, crime/spy fiction, science fiction, fantasy, horror, western, historical, adventure) has distinctive cultural and industrial, as well as formal and historical, features, and that each in turn plays host to a myriad of subgenres that have their own distinctive logics and practices.

Describing popular fiction as the 'opposite' of Literature (capital L to signal canonical, 'high art', Modernist, intellectually demanding), Gelder level-headedly speaks up for the reputation of popular

fiction without taking an 'anti-Literature' position – a tendency common among popular fiction writers and fans in (perhaps understandable) reaction to dismissive academic attitudes. He thus starts his book with a reassessment of the debate about high versus popular culture, drawing attention to the very different, and often "mutually repulsive and repudiating" logics and practices of the two literary fields. Gelder shows how, though readers may "very well move from the one to the other", the pleasures and definitions of both fields work in binary opposition to each other, and as such they also need each other for their self-definition. In direct opposition to Literature, popular fiction values conventions over originality, craft over art, industry over creativity, simplicity over complexity, ingenuity over genius, popularity, fame and financial success over literary reputation and elitist prestige. But these characteristics do not mean (as Modernist critics traditionally assumed) that popular fiction is a mindless, indiscriminating or uninformed area. The field is successful precisely because it is self-referentially knowledgeable, meticulously researched, and surrounded by complex "quasi-academic or para-academic" processing activities and organisations which give "detailed attention to a literary field *outside* of the university, but in a recognisably academic, even scholarly manner". These processing activities constitute an entire apparatus of production, distribution and consumption, and include publishers and bookshops, official and unofficial organisations committed to genre fiction of one kind or another (including foundations responsible for a very wide range of annual genre awards like the Nebula or the Hugo for SF), fanzines and professional genre magazines (prozines) and an extraordinarily diverse number of fans and readers having their say in circles ranging from internet websites to local book groups. These processing activities, Gelder points out, "turn the field of popular fiction into something like a *system*, which constantly looks at itself and tries to do justice to what it sees".

One literary category which Gelder locates somewhere between popular fiction and Literature is what he terms 'Popular Literature'. This is a problematic and (as Gelder himself acknowledges) potentially contentious distinction. Popular Literature in this definition includes the work of authors like Jane Austen and Charles Dickens and "is often marked by long-term popularity, usually generated through

educational apparatuses these days, and which can indeed have a structural and symbiotic relationship to popular fiction itself". Part of the problem with this categorisation is that it is usually applied to 'classic/popular' authors (we could include Shakespeare, Cervantes and Swift here) whose works were popular *and* critically respected before the entrenchment of high-low culture distinctions normally associated with literary and critical modernism. This is an area which clearly calls for more research and debate.

The social and cultural dimensions of popular fiction, its resilience and longevity, and how it both influences and is in turn deeply embedded in politics, ideology and belief systems, are particularly well captured in the chapter on *The Lord of the Rings* and epic fantasy fiction. Looking at Tolkien's 1950s trilogy and Peter Jackson's recent film adaptations alongside commentaries on, and anxieties about, the rise of global terrorism and the 'war on terrorism', Gelder shows how, rather than being ephemeral and disposable, popular fiction can "become relevant *as if for the first time* to world events at a much later date". This "twenty-first-century entanglement of fantasy and reality" manifests itself in, among other

places, the discourse surrounding popular and journalistic attempts to make sense of September 11 and its aftermath, as well as in the "perhaps rather unexpected identification of Middle Earth itself with New Zealand".

Gelder describes his book as wanting to give visibility and definition to that "blind spot in the winnowing process" (a term he borrows from Stephen King) which leaves the bulk of the fiction written and read in contemporary cultures outside the field of vision of mainstream literary studies. *Popular Fiction* succeeds in doing this admirably, and it will doubtless prove an invaluable resource for students in university courses on popular literature, literary theory and cultural studies. But Gelder clearly also wants to reach out beyond the walls of university departments to the professional practitioners and readers of popular fiction themselves. This is nothing less than an attempt to break down boundaries and mutual prejudice. One can only wish this venture success.

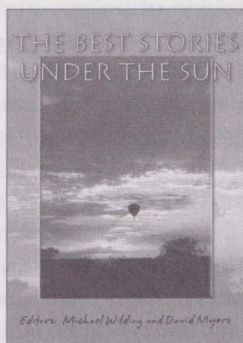
Joe Grixti is in the School of Social and Cultural Studies, Massey University, Auckland, New Zealand.

A LITTLE INFLATED

CATE KENNEDY

Michael Wilding and David Myers (eds): *Best Stories Under the Sun* (CQUP, \$25.95)

Short-story anthologies often offer an eclectic range of voices, but the Central Queensland University Press's anthology *Best Stories Under the Sun*, edited by Michael Wilding and David Myers, is without doubt the only current collection to showcase a talking fish, a vampire, and a female impersonator, among others. Despite this, though, and the award credentials of several of its contributors, this anthology is a rather patchy mix. Perhaps it's because of the juxtaposition of stories, essays, ads and extracts from novels-in-progress which make up its pages. Perhaps I'm too much of a purist or traditionalist, but if I'm buying an anthology of 'best stories' my



expectation is for a showcase of short stories, a form which is somewhat of an endangered species in current publishing trends.

Marele Day's contribution is a short essay on swimming. Barry Oakley reminisces about 1950s Australian society in an article which first appeared in the *Weekend Australian*. Marian Halligan gives us a favourite recipe. Wilding himself submits a piece from his forthcoming book: a long, detailed anecdote about taking magic mushrooms in Byron Bay in the seventies.

Even many of the short stories read more like rambling anecdotes, lacking a sense of precision, specificity or resolution. Several seemed to hover at their conclusion, straining to pull the point of their narrative together with such lines as: "If I could turn back time . . ." and "It doesn't really matter. Life trundles on."

This is not to say there isn't some strong fiction in the collection. Ian Callinan's story about a cricket bat, cheating and just desserts shows careful attention to character and plotting, while Carmel Bird's

wonderfully resonant ‘What World is This?’ illustrates a masterful grasp of dual narrative voice and pace, surging forward with urgent poetic detail.

There’s also a story included here by US author Jack London, written during a visit to Australia in 1908–09. It’s interesting to contrast his story ‘A Piece of Steak’, written almost a hundred years ago, with contemporary trends in short fiction. London’s story – with its long detailed set-up and physical descriptions, its exposition continually reminding the reader of what’s at stake for the protagonist – seems a little heavy-handed now, lacking the oblique touch of imagery and subtext taught to today’s writing students as crucial for reader engagement. And yet the story, of a boxer losing his power at the end of his career and spiralling into poverty and loss, does engage. Perhaps London, during his stay in Australia, put his finger on the nation’s enduring love for the underdog, but this very traditional piece succeeds

through a focus on a key moment, a vision of someone wanting something they can’t get. Several other stories in this collection seem a little shapeless and unengaging by comparison.

A final quibble: advertised as “perfect” for “the beach, the bedside, the airport and the Christmas stocking”, I found the size bulky and the cover already curling from being folded awkwardly to fit into a bag. The book’s cover image, of a silhouetted balloon taking off into a sunrise-red sky, reminiscent of a seventies inspirational poster, gives the book a prematurely dated feel.

There are some good stories in here, but the ‘Best Stories Under the Sun’? A little inflated, you’d have to say, and mostly hot air.

Cate Kennedy has won national short-fiction prizes and is the author of two poetry collections: *Signs of Other Fires* (2001) and *Joyflight* (2004). She lives in north-east Victoria, where she works as a freelance editor and writer in residence.

COMPILATIONS

KALINDA ASHTON

Marion M. Campbell, Rhonda Dredge, Alex Landragin, Henry von Doussa (eds): *Strange Shapes* (Crooked Styles Press, \$25)

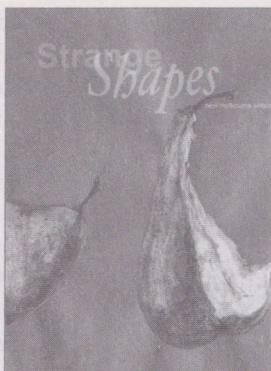
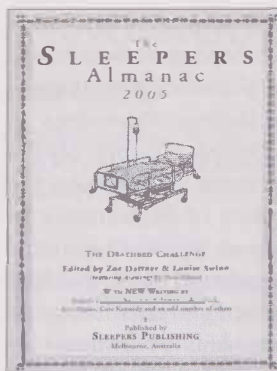
Zoe Dattner & Louise Swinn (eds): *The Sleepers Almanac 2005* (Sleepers Publishing, \$24.95)

Rachel Judd & Bradley Dawson (eds): *White-Ant #2: How do you know what the truth is?* (White-Ant Press, \$13.50)

There is a surprising degree of synchronicity between these three small-press offerings – a 2004 collection of creative writing from Melbourne University post-graduates, the second issue of *White-Ant* and the recently established *Sleepers Almanac*. In different ways many of the individual essays, stories and poems across the publications raise common themes: war, disease, obsession and fanaticism. The short stories and political essays depict traumatic ruptures and explosions and reveal bleak visions of the future. Here are brief sexual encounters and violent rituals, suffocating religious hysteria, minor lapses and arresting accidents, some played out with the end of the world in sight. As independent publications, all three provide opportunities for new and emerging writers and all benefit from the energy, inventiveness and imagination of talented young writers and fresh voices.

With a buoyant, *McSweeney’s* look-a-like design, littered with illustrations, recipes, cartoons and DIY fill-in-the-blanks lists, the *Sleepers Almanac* is largely composed of short stories, although it contains a couple of poems, three non-fiction pieces, and a suite of 365-word prose pieces (of which Melissa Dwyer’s competition-winning tale is a delightfully clever example). It’s a relief to discover this *Almanac* promoting short stories at a time when the major publishing houses cite intractable market forces as the excuse for largely avoiding them. Themed ‘the death bed challenge’, here is fiction peopled by would-be criminals, zombies, coma-phobic narrators, wage slaves and diseased communities, in landscapes of used condoms and war-zone window dressing. Very few of the stories are realist. Most range from the increasingly surreal to the downright bizarre, the weird to the witty, from the ironic to the iconic and from parody to pastiche. Many stories employ strategies of appropriation and archetype, referencing and borrowing from popular culture, mythology and genre conventions. The stories are an innovative and unsettling bunch.

Brad Bryant’s ‘My Family’s Chances’ is a tenderly constructed story with black humour and wonderfully wrought pathos. Craig Garrett’s ‘Trolleys’ is



incisively surreal. ‘Sock Garter’ by Anna Hedigan is highly original and curiously compelling, while Leanne Hall’s ‘Day in the Sun’, one of the few successful realist stories in the *Almanac*, is a delicately conveyed and quietly paced insight into the consciousness of a mildly but painfully deluded shop manager. In non-fiction Cate Kennedy presents an impassioned case for the worthiness of the short story form, an amended version of a speech she made at last year’s Melbourne Writers’ Festival and Gideon Haigh bemoans ‘shit lit’ and the state of contemporary publishing. Poetry is barely represented.

Without wanting to seem like a wowsler, I found the pages of recipes unnecessary interpolations, introducing a tad too much cuteness, which took up valuable room.

Strange Shapes is a loosely themed collection of creative writing that brings together work by Melbourne University’s staff and postgraduate students, many of whom are new writers. This is a more varied collection of diverse stories and poems, as well as some unusual hybrids of both, visual images, one script and a non-fiction piece. The publication doesn’t have the boldness and instant identity of the *Almanac* but it does exhibit some very fine writing.

Cassandra Atherton’s ‘Plasticine Lover’ is a triumph of a short story, unnerving, hilarious, moving and ribald. Michael Kitson’s ‘Poetry’ll lead us to Crime’ and Fiona Hile’s ‘Stink Fruit’ are also creatively realised, carefully built, slyly funny stories. While the *Almanac* gives us stories with titles like ‘The Plague’ and ‘Cappuccino, Soft Drink and the End of the World’, disaster and Christianity also turn up in *Strange Shapes*. Fundamentalist Christianity, war in the Middle East and VCE results combine in Vanessa Russell’s ‘Red Cross Calling’, which

concludes “Oh to the end of the world and back”, while the Pentecostal community is the background for Amy Espeseth Turner’s elegantly sketched ‘Small Things’. The poetry in *Strange Shapes* is consistently strong, particularly the rhythmic contributions from Grant Caldwell.

At a time when global politics is dominated by the so-called war on terror the latest issue of *White-Ant* sets itself the stern task of searching for truth. Contributors write about censorship, media manipulation, misrepresentation and omission and contemplate questions about the meaning of history and memory. *White-Ant* is the most tightly focused on its central theme of all the publications, with non-fiction writing on the occupation of Iraq, St Kilda sex workers, *Aljazeera* and Critical Mass. There are short stories and poems too, but it’s the polemical political essays that linger in the mind.

Jeff Sparrow’s quest to discover the truth behind the bombing of a house in Nicholson Street in 1898 becomes a sophisticated and gentle reflection on what it means to rely on the scraps and silences of history to tell us about the struggles of the past. ‘Assailed by Anarchists’ considers how the powerful will relentlessly attempt to deflect, appropriate, defer, confuse or deny any historical truth that hurts them. The case of the unsolved bomb attack, initially blamed by the papers on sinister anarchists, is also a reminder that misinformation and media spin have long histories. Rebecca Whalen’s considered account of *Aljazeera*, the Middle-East’s sole independent news source and the subject of *The Control Room* documentary, is also compelling, as is an interview with political artist Deborah Ostrow and Jon Cleary’s argument about primitive accumulation in Iraq. *White-Ant* is a welcome forum for otherwise marginalised voices and ideas. It’s a terrific, committed and original publication.

A curious by-product of reading all these publications together is a growing sense of how few emerging and young writers appear to be interested in producing realist short stories. Many of the stories with the most energy and vivacity employ strategies of appropriation and allusion; exploit and sometimes invert genre conventions, e.g. science fiction; or underscore realist beginnings with reversals and subversions.

Kalinda Ashton is a young Melbourne writer and Research Masters student at RMIT.

OCEANS AWAY

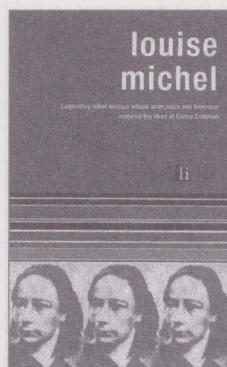
DANIELLE THORNTON

| Nic Maclellan (ed.): *Louise Michel* (Ocean Press, \$18)

Nic Maclellan introduces this collection of writings with the observation that although she is known in France, Louise Michel's remarkable career as a communist, anarchist, internationalist and fighter for women's rights, is generally unknown elsewhere. Yet when she visited Australia en route to France in 1880, after nearly a decade of exile, Michel was feted in Melbourne and Sydney by supporters of the 1871 Paris Commune. The Commune was celebrated annually by Australian radicals of all shades, with the flying of red flags and the singing of the 'Marseillaise'. If its example is seldom evoked today, this is a measure of the extent to which the traditions of the Left have been eroded.

This selection of writings, as much a history of the Commune as of Michel herself, is a welcome antidote to this collective amnesia. The series has so far documented the lives of individuals who are either relatively obscure (Michel, Haydee Santamaria, Sacco and Vanzetti) or else whose radicalism has been censored by conservative biographers (Albert Einstein, Helen Keller). Each title situates them in history, using their own words and those of their contemporaries. This volume includes excerpts from Michel's own memoirs and letters as well as from the writings of Engels, Marx, Bakunin, Kropotkin and even William Morris – a range which reflects the heterogeneity of late nineteenth-century radical thought. Maclellan's excellent introductory essay places each source in the context of Michel's life.

Born in 1830 and dying in 1905 on the eve of the massacre by Tsarist troops that would spark revolution in Russia, Michel's lifetime spanned over seventy years of unprecedented social unrest. As the illegitimate daughter of a landowner and a servant, she experienced first-hand the hypocrisy of Catholic morality. After moving to Paris in 1865, she quickly became immersed in a culture of radical republicanism. On 18 March 1871 the working-class suburbs of Paris rose up against the corrupt Versailles government and declared the birth of the Commune, the first government directly elected from ordinary workers anywhere in the world. Up until its suppression in May it issued a number of radical reforms, abolishing capital punishment, granting



adult suffrage for all men and allowing workers to run the abandoned workshops and factories themselves.

During this time Michel was active in mobilising the women of Montmartre in support of the Commune. The section by Michel 'On women's rights' and the documents by women citizens demanding their rights

are particularly moving and testify to the extraordinary power of revolution.

For Marx the radicalism of the Commune proved that it was now the working class alone who had the potential to create a new, truly socialist society, based on equality and cooperation. "When plain working men for the first time dared to infringe upon the governmental privilege of their 'natural superiors'" he wrote, "the old world writhed in convulsions of rage." The repression of the Commune was indeed savage. More than 20,000 communards and workers were killed and tens of thousands more arrested, including Michel, who defied the authorities to execute her. Her plea rejected, she was exiled to the French penal colony of New Caledonia, where she helped foment revolt among the indigenous Kanakas. On her return to Europe she continued to campaign in support of radical causes. When she died at the age of 74, her coffin was followed through Paris by a procession of 120,000 people.

The Commune continued to be a source of inspiration. Contributors to this book argue for the significance of the Commune today. Sheila Rowbotham reminds us of its legacy for feminists while Howard Zinn describes Marx's exuberant praise of its libertarianism as proof of the continuing relevance of his ideas for the Left. Finally, Paul Foot recalls the democratic example of the Commune and the appearance of similar workers' organisations during every subsequent revolutionary upheaval.

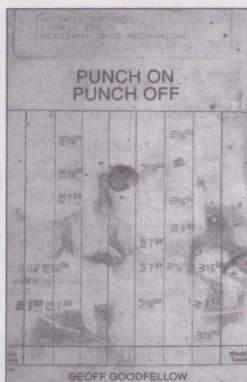
This book is an excellent reminder, for anyone demoralised by the re-election of Howard, that the starting place for social change has always been the resistance of ordinary people.

Danielle Thornton is a postgrad student at the University of Melbourne. She is writing a history of women's radical political activism in Australia and Britain.

A KNOCKOUT COLLECTION

JOHN HARMS

Geoff Goodfellow: *Punch On Punch Off* (Vulgar Press, \$14.95)



In the underrated movie *Breaking Away* a teenager escapes the drudgery of his small-town work-life through cycling. He is a ‘cutter’, the son of a quarry worker, and although proud of his people, is frustrated by the prospect of a long and arduous time in menial and poorly paid work. In one scene the foreman, a company man, says to the lad, “Don’t forget to punch the bundy”. As the kid walks past the clock he gives it a magnificent straight right. And keeps walking.

Poet Geoff Goodfellow could have written those stage directions, for he knows the minds of the characters, and he knows their situation, if not their predicament. Those characters exist wherever there is labour and capital, workers and bosses, and hard yakka to be done.

Goodfellow’s latest collection of poems, *Punch On Punch Off*, captures a key element of working-class life: that life is affected enormously by work (and the absence of work), but life is never defeated by work. Crafted from years of his own experience and observation, the poems celebrate the everyday lives of those trying to get by, while acknowledging how debilitating the treadmill of a working life can be.

‘The Grind’ is well-named and right on that theme. The subject of the poem is a young woman with “bright sparkling eyes / soft tender skin / & a cheeky grin” who has worked wherever she can to make do – in a funeral parlour, as a baker’s assistant, as a cake decorator and a checkout chick. She is also a single mum. Her car payment is overdue. Her insurance is coming up and the brake pads are stuffed anyway. She tries earnestly at work but the boss never trusts her. It’s not in the nature of the Mr Thompsons of the world. He is the subject of another poem: ‘Poetry in the Workplace’.

As unlikely as it may appear at first, Geoff Goodfellow spends a lot of time reading his poems to workers on building sites and in factories. But

workers are invariably engaged. The images and reflections are so real for them; the characters are so real; the observations of their lives are so real. They know about cars and support Central Districts and are happy to spend a day on the stool at the local. They can smash up a pinball machine like the subject does in ‘Bluey’. And so the people to whom Goodfellow reads nod their heads as they connect with the powerful oratory.

Goodfellow knows how work can sap the spirit. In ‘The Violence of Work’ he writes with clock-like rhythm:

*I work in a factory
Monday to Friday
punch on punch off
... i’m told to work faster
Monday to Friday
punch on punch off
... but complain to my partner
Monday to Sunday
want to punch on
punch on*

Goodfellow portrays the psychological and the physical effects of work. In ‘The Gateman’ an old brickies’ labourer tells the story of a simple incident with a full wheelbarrow:

*i was goin’ down a slope y’ see
too much & the bastard’s
got away
she’s fish-tailed like —
but shit
i’m nearly sixty mate —
i couldn’t pull it up
but there were no medals
for tryin’ either
just a lump in me groin
as big as Fenech’s fist*

These are characters Goodfellow knows. His own injury on a work site led him to the pen. In ‘What Mum told me in 1964’ he doubts her thesis that “hard work never killed anyone”. Of working men he writes in that poem:

*i’ve seen them all at times
less than halfway through
a working life
their big yellow envelopes*

*tucked under their wings
their bodies bent & twisted
& eyes downcast
their faces contorted with
their private pain*

The subjects of Goodfellow's poems are the battlers who get by. Their stories are hardly told in newspapers and magazines, in a world where aspirational wage-earners clamour for the drizzled jus of bourgeois consumerism.

ANARCHY AND POETRY

SARAH ATTFIELD

Jas H. Duke, selected and edited by π.o.: *Poems of Life and Death* (Collective Effort Press, \$40)

*I really love being alive
When I'm dead I'm going to love being dead*
—'Positive Poem'

π.o. does not do things by halves, and this book is testament to his passion. It is a true labour of love: part biography, part archival document and part collection of poetry by his friend Jas H. Duke, whose life and work is reproduced here in fascinating and glorious detail.

Although I had come across some of Duke's poems, I knew nothing about the poet until reading the first section of this book, an intimate portrait of a unique man who seems to have lived his life out of step with conventional society. The detailed biography gives the reader an insight into the mind of the poet and follows his journey of poetic experimentation which began with surrealist and sound poetry and evolved into lucid poems that engage with the underdog and demonstrate a deep dissatisfaction with the inequalities within society. As Duke is quoted in the book:

I wanted to stand up for women workers, migrants, handicapped people, rural workers and all the less powerful people who were in terrible danger of being run over by the money-grubbing all-power-to-the-strongest society that we've been lumbered with.

π.o. has included Duke's notes, snippets of unfinished poems, lists of one-liners and ideas, which provide a rare glimpse into Duke's creative processes. π.o. adds his own notes so that the reader is not left with a set of dangling, unmanageable phrases and

Mark Latham made a huge blue when he told working people they needed to climb the ladder out of their situation. Latham's comment was insensitive. Implicitly, and probably without even realising it, he was dismissing working-class identity, and pride, as if somehow such lives didn't have the same worth.

Geoff Goodfellow would never do that.

John Harms' most recent publication is *The Pearl: Steve Renouf's Story* (UQP, 2005).



lines, and there are some real gems and striking images: "sliding down the razorblade of life", "happiness won't buy you money" and "death is sleeping without responsibility". Some of the notes work as short poems in their own right, and possess a dry wit and sense of irony: "The gov-

ernment has/ decided that the/ people are wrong/ Therefore the people/ must be disbanded". As Duke was influenced by surrealist and dadaist poetry, there are also many snippets and fragments of poems that focus more on the sound of the words, and stream of consciousness writing.

Within the selection of finished poems Duke's deadpan humour is evident, especially in poems such as 'Positive Poem', "I love my work/ . . . I love my boss (who tells me what to do)/ I love the government . . ." Duke's poems and sentiments are as relevant today as when they were written: "Imagine Australia/ Without Bob Hawke as Prime Minister/ Without a Prime Minister at all/ There are no US bases/ No military bases of any sort/ No uranium mining/ Nor any other mining/ No logging of rain forests/ or of any other forest/ . . . No native plant and animal species are endangered/ . . . The Kooris are in command of their own destiny/ . . . New life is made in the natural way/ Food the natural way/ You can't imagine it?/ Well think of Australia/ in 1787."

There is often a sense of speaking out against inequality: "Give the inhabitants of one place/ marble palaces to live in/ give the inhabitants of another/ sheets of tin and plastic bags/ DIVERSITY!" ('Di-

versity’); “Can you imagine Mr Viner/and his gang of true-blue bludgers/ going up and down a ladder 12 hours a day/ filling that many bins with pears/ getting blood, sweat and poison on their old school ties/ doing that sort of work for that sort of money?” (‘Letter from my Brother in the Country’). Most of the poems are written in a direct, unadorned style and are driven by the rhythms of everyday speech: “People are sent to Australian Universities/ So they can study/ And eventually graduate/ And say with great conviction/ For the rest of their lives/ We haven’t got the know-how in Australia”. Interspersed with the narrative poems are sound poems, prose poems, short stories, mini plays and visual poems. Surrealist collages, drawings and photos are scattered throughout. The collection also includes an audio CD of Duke reading his poetry. His ‘blokey’ delivery creates a strange sensation: he does not possess the ‘refined’ and well-enunciated voice often

associated with poetry reading. The final section of the book consists of Duke’s ideas on poetics, which again provides the reader with a glimpse into the workings of a complicated mind. Within these notes Duke comments on his influences and intentions and states that he attempted to remain open to a variety of styles and not to “close eyes and ears to all but a few hero leaders”.

This impressive collection is testament to Duke’s open-mindedness and to his sense of compassion and understanding for those at the margins. *π.o.* has created a fitting tribute to his friend, whose life was unfortunately cut short, but whose poetry can hopefully reach a wide audience through this excellent publication.

Sarah Atfield is a working-class poet whose first collection was *Hope in Hell* (FIP), published in 2000. She is a PhD candidate in working-class poetry at UTS.

WELFARE ‘WARS’?

MARK PEEL

Peter Saunders: *Australia’s Welfare Habit and How to Kick It* (Duffy & Snellgrove, \$33)

This is in many ways an unlikeable book. This is not because of what it recommends; in my view, some of Saunders’ suggestions are sensible, while others have merit but probably wouldn’t work in the real world in the way he hopes. His arguments about improving the transitions between welfare and work bear particular consideration, even if he loads upon them unnecessary and distracting assumptions about people’s unwillingness to work. Nor is it unlikeable because it rests, in my view, on an error: for the majority of the vulnerable and sometimes damaged people about whom he is writing, Saunders mistakes one of poverty’s symptoms – which he calls welfare dependency – for its cause. He emphasises the behaviour that causes poverty, while I’d want to go further back, to talk first about the poverty that helps explain that behaviour and then to ask from what kinds of vulnerability that poverty stemmed.

What’s unlikeable here is the combativeness, and the hubris that stems from it. Saunders seems preoccupied with a war between fixed positions that he is desperately keen to win. It is part of the tiresome struggle against largely invented enemies that has

come to characterise supposedly ‘independent’ commentary. Assuming the worst of his foes, Saunders copies the very tactics of which he accuses them. He talks of “highly-charged” arguments “couched in emotional language” and says: “rhetoric has been allowed to masquerade as analysis, emotion has displaced logic and evidence, and intellectual orthodoxy has stifled critical thinking and debate”. What then to make of calling ‘welfare dependency’ an “addiction”? What then, to take another example, do we make of Saunders’ claim that “increased welfare has . . . gone hand in hand with a massive rise in the incidence of crime and other social pathologies”? No emotional language or rhetoric there? What is the detailed evidence that establishes a causal relationship between these phenomena? Any author should be wary of demanding a precision from others they seem willing to disavow for themselves. The front cover, meanwhile, shows five fifty-dollar bills being given from one person to another, with ‘AUSTRALIA’S WELFARE HABIT and how to kick it’ written above it. That wouldn’t be a loaded image, would it? That wouldn’t show something that doesn’t actually happen in order to stir the emotions?

Saunders is just as inconsistent in other ways. When it suits him, as when the “welfare lobby” is “wildly out of step” with opinion polls, public opinion is a stick with which to beat his opponents. When it doesn’t, and he is advocating policies a majority of Australians clearly don’t support, then public

opinion becomes something that brave politicians must rise above. Some of his claims are astonishing. Welfare spending and dependency have grown, he writes, because governments have been “swayed” by pressure groups, “influenced” by social affairs academics and intellectuals, “stampeded” by the media and “enticed” by their own desires for re-election. But the “welfare dependent” people at the heart of this book are the unemployed and single parents, along with those on disability support pensions. Is he really meaning to imply that in the past forty years the media has “stampeded” governments into more support for the unemployed and single parents? This would be a breathtakingly original claim.

Again and again, the useful points and arguments in this book are swamped by its author’s desire for victory at all costs. It is about winning the point, not exploring complexities and subtleties. It’s about the evidence your argument needs, not the unanticipated conclusions to which the evidence might lead you. Saunders’ targets, he says, ask loaded questions, twist surveys to their own ideological ends, and only use the evidence that supports their view. Well, on the evidence of much of this book, so does he.

But in the end, what is most disappointing is the sense that other points of view probably won’t matter much anyway. Everything here is so predictable. This is one of those books where you know always what’s going to happen; one read of the back cover is enough. Its assumptions, arguments and conclusions are just as predictable as what might emerge from any other pre-determining ideology: right, left, centre, up, down, liberal, radical, whatever. Self-styled political conservatives will feel themselves vindicated by being told what they already believe. The people who share his ideological position will applaud Saunders’ cleverness. As he did for them, they will quote him and cite him and castigate others as ‘so-called experts’ and ‘egalitarians’ while insisting that the United States is our best model for the future. And some of the people who don’t share his position will call him a right-winger and a conservative (neither of which is accurate, as far as I can tell). They will quote him and cite him and castigate others as ‘ideologues’ and ‘economic rationalists’ and go on about Michael Moore. Ho hum.

To understand poverty, welfare and dependency we need less hubris and more humility. Less lecturing, much less hectoring, and more listening. We need fewer people scoring points off each other and

playing with statistics, and more people confronting the lived experience of poverty and dependency and the desperately hard questions that are raised by them. Too many of the participants in the so-called welfare debate, and that includes politicians of most shades, actually don’t know much about the real problems and the real solutions. I think there is a way out of this, but ramping up the war of words isn’t it. A way forward begins with listening to the people who know the problems best and have already started working on the solutions: the people who live and work with them as their daily reality. It means accepting that they have ideas, not just experiences, and that they know some very important things about what to do. They don’t need sticks to make them work, or more and more strenuous demands for mutual obligation. Nor do they need social capital and capacity-building. They need to be heard.

It’s hard, because they’ll say things that don’t fit orthodoxies and neat ideologies, from the right, the centre or the left. They’ll confound the smug confidence of fixed positions. They don’t know everything, and they’re the first to tell you that. They don’t need the last word, but they need to begin the conversation, because they know something the winners don’t know. They know about vulnerability. They know how easy it is to fall and how hard it is to climb back up. They have come to realise how important are the investments we make in the safety and protection of others. They know that in the end you can’t just look after yourself and your own, because for most of us that kind of guarantee is impossible to attain or maintain. If you’re prepared to listen, if you have the capacity for empathy, what impresses you is how hard this all is. It leads you away from platitudes and certainties. It unpicks what you thought you knew and sets out some new challenges. It’s dangerous stuff, whatever your politics and however set-in-stone your assumptions. It’s very hard to listen, especially to people who don’t talk the talk. It’s easier just to snipe at other people you’ve organised into a “social policy establishment” (or, for that matter, a “right-wing government”). But if you want to know anything, or say anything that moves beyond posturing, listening is where you have to start.

Mark Peel is an historian at Monash University and the author of *The Lowest Rung: Voices of Australian Poverty* (CUP, 2003).

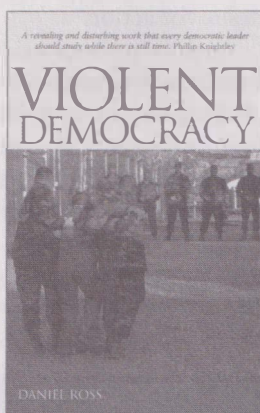
INITIATING CHANGE

RJURIK DAVIDSON

Daniel Ross: *Violent Democracy* (CUP, \$34.95)

The explosion of books engaging with contemporary politics – Iraq, political Islam, America’s global role, refugees and asylum seekers, war and terrorism – indicates that there is indeed something ‘happening’ in the world. One knows the style and content of these texts in advance: a mixture of politics, history, or journalism, forged in an accessible style for popular consumption, and proposing a radical or left-liberal understanding of the contemporary world. It is thus exciting to find Daniel Ross’s *Violent Democracy*, which tackles these issues from the vantage point of political philosophy. More accurately, the book is an application and development of the ideas of a number of important political philosophers – Schmitt on sovereignty, Agamben on concentration camps, Benjamin on violence, Derrida on forgiveness, Steigler on technology – to these issues. This approach allows Ross to roam widely in the construction of his arguments, introducing here the discussion of Wolfowitz’s document, ‘Defense Planning Guidance’, there a cultural studies discussion of the film *The Sixth Sense* as an introduction to the issues surrounding ‘reconciliation’. This particular combination makes sense when we remember that Ross himself is a trained philosopher and that he is the co-director of *The Ister*, a genre-breaking documentary that engages with Heideggerian thought.

If *Violent Democracy* is loosely structured, each chapter is nevertheless pitched at a high theoretical level. The book is a challenge for us to think rigorously about contemporary politics, and Ross’s argument is clear from the beginning: “Two thoughts underlie this book. The first is that the origin and heart of democracy is essentially violent. The second is that our present situation is revealing new forms of the violent potential of democracy, and that this is presently transforming the character of the ‘democracies’ we inhabit”. Democracy is violent because “the concepts of a people, a border, and of



foundation are violent *in themselves*, in that they are all ideas that must be *imposed* . . . in order to get democracy going”. The book is thus a trenchant and powerful critique of left-liberalism with its concern for the ‘rule of law’ and universalist ‘human rights’, and which, unable to think its own limits, often prefers to ignore the violent logic of democracy. The book’s practical conclusions are sure to annoy left-liberals who would reject Ross’s claim that, for example, to ask for an apology from the government for the genocide of Australian Aborigines avoids the real tasks of reconciliation. Or that in the republican debate the monarchist’s fear of political destabilisation was preferable to the opportunism of the republicans as they were “at least based upon some kind of argument”. If its overall thesis is compelling, almost no-one will agree with the book’s entirety. But such a summary does little justice to the richness and density of the argument which continually throws out insights and surprises, making us see things in a new light.

The very strength of *Violent Democracy* proves to also be its weakness. If Ross asks us to think rigorously about contemporary politics, he is sometimes too much the philosopher, or more accurately, his philosophy fails to take into account history, economics or even politics at their appropriate weight. This leads him into a series of conclusions, perfectly logical within the context of his argument, and yet too trapped in the vicissitudes of abstract thought. To claim that those “who make declarations that found democracies are *never* the people themselves” and that therefore never “coming ‘from the people themselves’, democracy is always and *must* always be given *from the outside*” unnecessarily conflates a number of different processes. Is the example of the French Revolution not different from the possibility of exporting democracy to Iraq (the context in which Ross’s claim is made)? The claim that the war against Afghanistan was “simply to satisfy the desire for action” and that it occurred because “*democracy* demanded it” ignores the vast amount of research into the material and strategic interests that were at play. Not least of these interests, in both Afghanistan and later Iraq, is access to the region’s oil.

In these silences *Violent Democracy* is a picture of our contemporary intellectual moment. It is at once cutting-edge in its reference to important

and, dare I say, fashionable theorists. Yet at the same time an entire strand of critics of democracy – those descended from the traditional left – are absent from the work. This current, no doubt, has fallen from favour. Yet there are a number of enabling concepts that could have helped Ross to avoid those silences: if not class then capital (which gets a cursory mention), material interests, hegemony, ideology, or social relations. It is not here a matter of imposing a theoretical paradigm on Ross, but simply of recognising that such concepts may have allowed him to modify the claim

that the war against Afghanistan occurred because democracy demanded it and “simply to satisfy the desire for action”.

Such objections aside, *Violent Democracy* is a serious and worthwhile book which throws out a challenge to us all to think rigorously about the foundations and logic of democracy. Ross’s refusal to reach for the first available formulations, or for too easy conclusions, can only be commended.

Rjurik Davidson is Research & Information Officer at RMIT Student Union (TAFE) and a long-time socialist activist.

schmoozing | LOUISE SWINN

FOLLOW THAT TRAY OF CANAPÉS!

ADVENTURES AND MISADVENTURES AT THE SYDNEY WRITERS’ FESTIVAL, MAY 2005

ONE OF THE THINGS I do for a living is organise what can loosely be called literary events. So I have a fair notion of how rewarding a good literary shindig can be and how frustrating a bad one can be, and I have some idea of the recipe for their sweet success. I have learnt that, regardless of venue, facilities, cost of admission, quality of drinks and company, the literary personage – that is, the talent – must be of a high calibre. Unfortunately for many authors, this doesn’t simply mean that they need to work well on the page – they don’t merely need to be brilliant writers. It also means that as people they need to work on stage. These are not the same things at all. The talent needs to be, at least to some degree, entertaining, which is a lot to ask of people who excel at doing something that is often no less than a frenzied, unsociable act of madness, benevolence and rebellion.

My agenda in attending the Sydney Writers’ Festival was fivefold. First, as a literary event organiser, to research what works and what doesn’t. Second, as co-director of a hugely successful empire, to hear what other, smaller, publishers are excited about, and how and if Sydney’s publishing environment is different. Third, as a writer, to feel the power and genius of other writers. Fourth, as a reader, to discover new and old talent, and be engaged. And fifth, as a member of the Melbourne Writers’ Festival

programming committee, to see what’s going down at other festivals.

I enjoyed myself, so I’ll start with the things I didn’t like. I grew up in the UK, a result of which is a fear of queuing; and unfortunately I had to do a lot of it at the SWF. For the attendance numbers, there weren’t enough toilets, and those that existed were in dire need of money being spent on them. Over the course of the weekend the toilets became more and more broken as the queue grew. Same problem with the kiosk. When I finally got to the front of the queue, too many people had ordered the same coffee as me (double-decaf honey-mocha soy baby-cino, four sweeteners) and mine was lost. The facilities let the festival down. But that’s it with the negatives because it was my weekend. I wanted to have fun, and I didn’t want to work too hard to have it.

I don’t want to see mumbling monosyllabic performances, so I chose my events carefully, not just selecting the authors I favour but putting weight on a writer’s stage presence – any chance of a complimentary champagne or delectable morsel for my pregnant companion and effervescent business partner, Zoe, was just an added bonus. I have forgotten the order in which I saw things, so all higgledy-piggledy here are some highlights.

Just like Australian actors (only not as prone to phone-throwing and photographer-suing), our authors are about to be damn hot . . .

On Friday night, five people were awarded the 'Sydney Morning Herald Best Young Australian Novelists' award. The author who stood out – a 22-year-old in so-low-slung (I can see your undies) jeans and a hip haircut – was Craig Silvey. His reading, the clarity and sincerity of his answers, took me by surprise. Malcolm Knox, literary editor of the *SMH* and host of the awards night, commented on the lack of books from the biggest publishing houses, and it was notable that of the five winners, three were published by Allen & Unwin, a large independent (the others were from Fremantle Arts Centre Press and Wakefield Press).

The world stage is on the verge of a storm of recognition for new and emerging Australian writers – led by people like Elliot Perlman, M.J. Hyland and Christos Tsiolkas. Just like Australian actors (only not as prone to phone-throwing and photographer-suing), our authors are about to be damn hot, and I salute anyone giving them a chance to get their words in motion. Silvey's *Rhubarb* is a delight; an incredibly solid first novel, full of longing and despair, with modest moments of bliss. He reads his work well, and at a festival that makes all the difference.

I saw Alan Hollinghurst in conversation with Robert Dessaix at the Sydney Theatre. One of the things I like about Hollinghurst is that he's no bullshit. Not just in the way that we think of when we use the term 'no bullshit' (that is, he calls a spade a spade; what-you-see-is-what-you-get), but in the sense that he doesn't appear to make things up just for the sake of answering. He doesn't guess, he doesn't pontificate, and he doesn't appear to be caught up in thinking that he is, essentially, fascinating. He thinks about things – he allows for the pause (not the pause-for-effect pause but the genuine, hang-on-a-sec-while-I-test-my-thoughts-out pause). I like that he didn't carp on and on endlessly about himself and his writing, especially given the fact that in that environment we would have indulged him. So I felt as though what he did say, he meant, and it illuminated my reading of his work.

On the whole, I am a fan of book launches. They are an important celebration of the book and the

writer, and a good opportunity for readers to put faces to books, and to further their understanding of a work. I enjoyed the *Treaty* launch and the UTS writers' anthology launch, which was launched by the ever-eloquent and enthusiastic Anna Funder (I feel like a kid with a speech impediment every time I say it). The launch of Christos Tsiolkas's *Dead Europe* was, as well as complete with free champagne and canapés, very moving. It's clear that Tsiolkas has a lot of support from his publishers and from his readers, established and new, which is vital because his work is challenging and unusual. The speeches were refreshingly devoid of in-jokes, and Tsiolkas was gracious. The delicious morsels served up with the champagne were of a high standard, too.

I watched Morry Schwartz and Frank Moorhouse in conversation with Julianne Schultz (*Griffith Review* editor). They talked about, amongst other things, existing opportunities for writers, how things have and haven't changed over the past few decades, and the role of independent publishers. I had a brief romantic glimpse into our publishing history, and it was the anecdotes more than the statistics that I took away with me. No free wine at that one, and I had a thirst on, so I went in search.

The SWF is held right on the windy waterfront, which is where I was sitting when I was offered – a number of times – shots of a new aniseed cocktail (vile but at the same time more-ish). These little numbers were being brought around by women in tiny labcoats, stilettos, fishnets and pretend glasses (I discovered, in a micro-interview that resulted from me trying to put my finger through one of their sets of 'glasses', that the woman had been coerced into this – she had been told she'd be wearing pants). Watching Hollinghurst do a live-to-air radio broadcast through the window, these women looked kind of ridiculous. If I'd remembered my scarf, I would have slung it around one of them and taken her inside for a steaming mug of vanilla-malt choc-o-latte. Why was she there?

It got me thinking. What I loved most about the festival was that I could afford to be there. Apart from the airfare and a couple of events, most of the sessions that I attended – maybe nine out of ten – didn't require any payment. If I lived in Sydney,

Latham's political career represented a sustained (and largely unrequited) courtship of this 'aspirational' grouping. By the end of 2004, his many speeches had made the 'ladder of opportunity' and the 'aspirational voter' wearily familiar to most voters.

Sean Scalmer: Searching for the Aspirationalists

Should Jack be convicted on the basis of the evidence being used, we fear it would set an appalling precedent. We don't want others to be denied their right to communicate with a lawyer. Nor do we want torture and duress to become an accepted part of the Australian legal system.

Les Thomas: My Brother 'Jihad Jack'

In Australia, art has always been torn between two ideals: the desire to develop an art that differs from the rest of the world, and a desire to be a part of the world's art; between, that is to say, a national and a universal vision.

Bernard Smith: Expressionism in Australia

It is hard to believe that in the 1950s new rules required that 'mixed race' people could only be admitted to Australia if they could provide genealogies that proved they had either three European grandparents or two European grandparents and two 'half-caste'. This is how it was not so long ago.

Arnold Zable: The Skeleton in the Closet

Literary communities are not immune from uncivilised stoushes both on and off the page. Arguments over class, gender and sexuality can prompt a bit of literary bruising, but the tetchy grounds of race, ethnicity, and more specifically multiculturalism, invariably trigger an all-in brawl.

Jessica Raschke: The Rise and Fall of 'Multicultural' Literature

Temper democratic bias Australian

"The pit bull of literary journals"

| *Australian Book Review*

"A rewarding mix of ideas, idealism and tough-minded analysis"

| *The Age*

"One of Australia's loopy-Left little magazines"

| *Editorial, The Australian*



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